FIRST LOOK! # JLA-AVENGERS!

FROM DOONESBURY TO PEANUTS
BERKE BREATHED
BLABS ABOUT
BLOOM COUNTY

HEAVY METAL
ART DIRECTOR
JOHN WORKMAN

REACHING
FOR THE STARS —
MIKE FRIEDRICH
ARGUES THE CASE FOR AGENTS

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S COMICS

inTERVIEW

#6

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(believe it or not!)

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UP FRONT

We've been whetting your appetite for **Don McGregor's** 007 extravaganza with teaser ads here in these pages since early this spring. In the meantime, the latest **Roger Moore** James Bond movie, OCTOPUSSY, has opened to critical and fan acclaim — and the next **Sean Connery** James Bond movie, NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN, is scheduled to open sometime this autumn.

With all this intense renewed interest in Bond, I can't tell you how many inquiries I've received from dealers who have been concerned that their distributor hasn't offered **McGregor's** 007 opus — not to mention from would-be readers of both Bond and Don.

Not to worry. We've been taking our time to put together the kind of film magazine never before seen about 007 and spy action series. Now that we've got it all together, I can at last announce a price — $2.95 — and give you a partial list of contents.

The whole project has been penned in Don's patented style, sprinkled with personal anecdotes and observations aplenty. **McGregor** answers the critics ("In Defense of Bond"), explores such classic spy series as THE PRISONER, THE AVENGERS and I SPY ("A Memory Tour"), takes us behind the scenes into the classic fight sequences and sensational stunts ("Bob Simmons: One Fight After Another"), and even dares to square James Bond off against Indiana Jones in a blow-by-blow character comparison.

But, best of all, the book is filled with photos Don says have never been seen before — step by step, shot by shot photo sequences detailing the classic Bond fight scenes! It's loaded with photos, facts and far-ranging reminiscences. If you're a Bond-ophile or an action film afficionado, you'll delight in the wealth of detail!

So be patient just a little longer, while we get this oneshot collectors item printed and distributed to your favorite comics shop. Or reserve a copy now and receive it early — shipped as it comes straight off the press. We're taking orders, at last.

-Dave

(By the way, the $2.95 price mentioned above is *all* we're charging — if you order in advance, Don'll personally pay the postage.)

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"JLA/AVENGERS has taught me a bitter lesson."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: George Perez
Born: South Bronx, New York City
Occupation: Cartoonist
Training: Self-taught
Credits: NEW TEEN TITANS, THE AVENGERS, FANTASTIC FOUR, MAN-WOLF, JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, THE INHUMANS, etc.
Pet Peeve: People gabbing in a theater.
Favorite Color: Bluish green, except on suits.
Favorite Movies: INHERIT THE WIND and THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
Favorite Pastime: Carol Flynn

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THE AVENGERS®

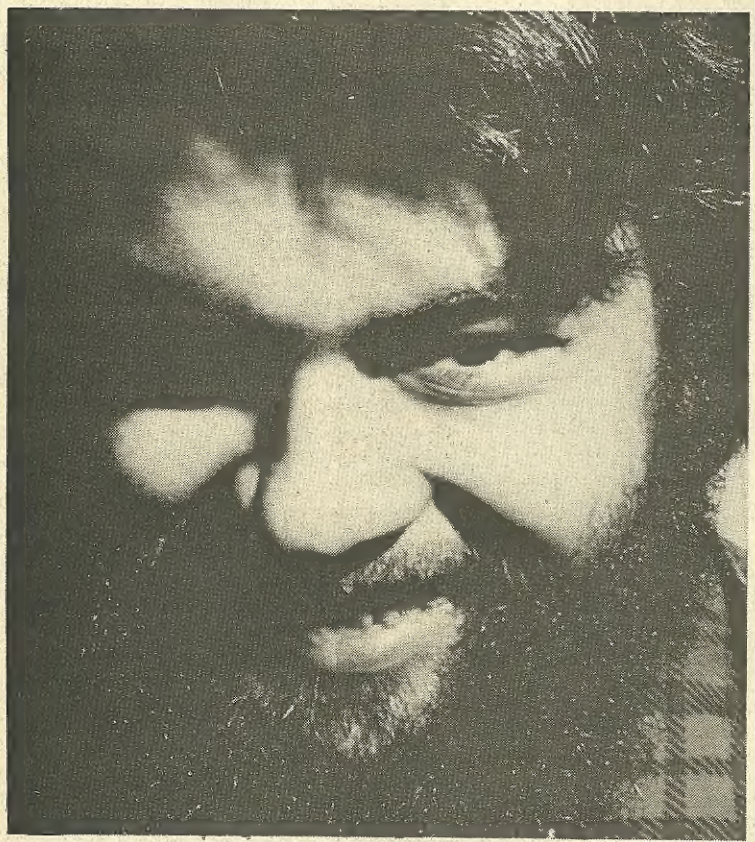


Photo: D. Jon Zimmermann

PEREZ

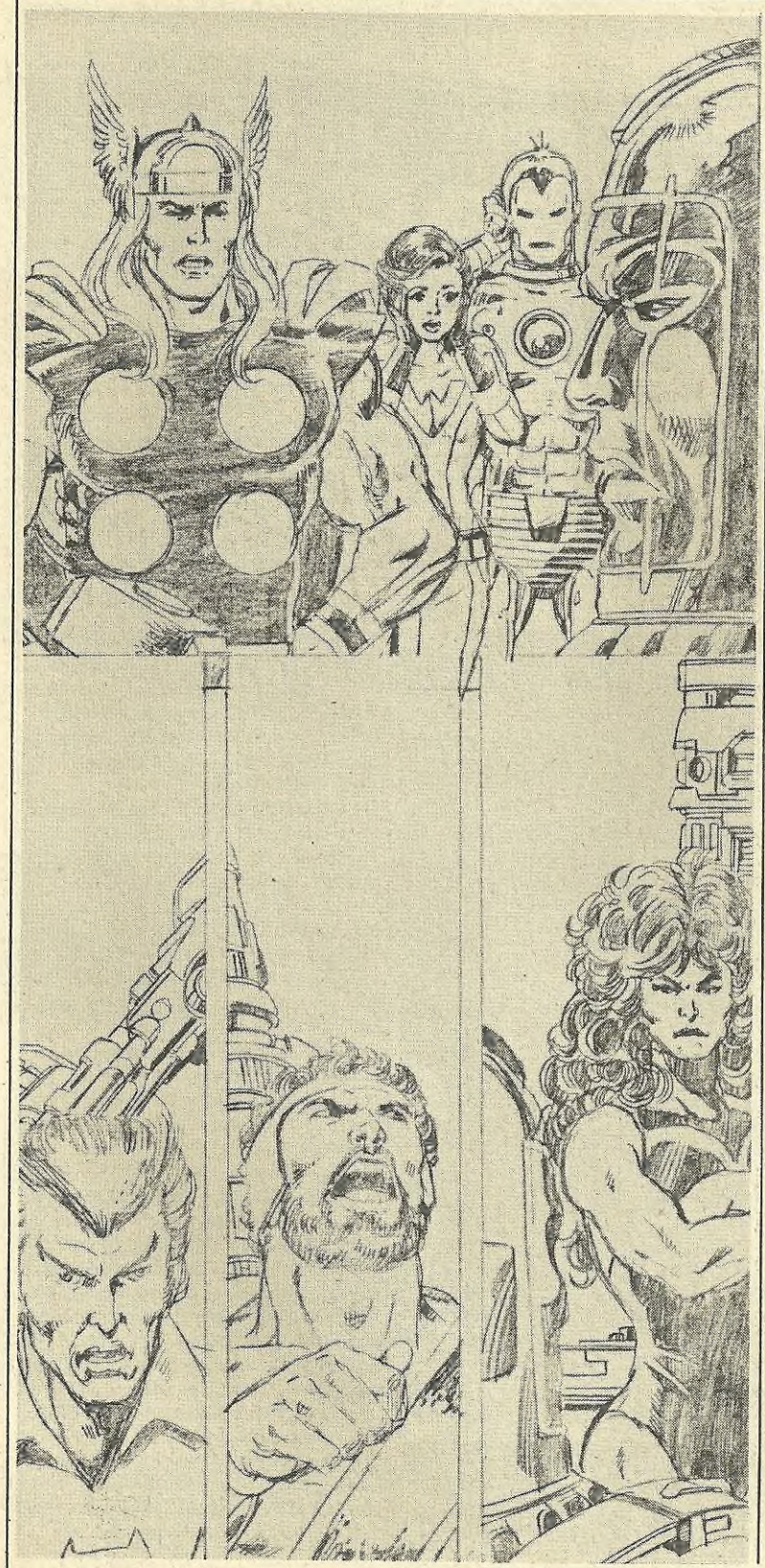
DAK: *Well, gee, all the questions I had prepared no longer seemed to apply. Here we are, having waited to the last minute — and yet, as we go to press, it's not even certain whether there'll actually be a JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA/AVENGERS book!*

GEORGE PEREZ: Ever since I agreed to do this JLA/AVENGERS crossover, I've been very excited about it. I even jokingly threatened anyone else with a letter-bomb who even tried to get the assignment! I first asked for a plot all the way back as far as November or December of 1981, so I could have it really ahead of schedule, since it was scheduled for a summer 1983 release. **Gerry Conway** was working on other things, so he got it to me later than I would have wanted — but still in plenty of time to get it done. It was a very, very good plot, although it seemed to have a hell of a lot of plot holes.

DAK: *What was the original plot?*

GEORGE: It was a time story, wherein Kang the Conqueror and the Lord of Time somehow dislodge and chase after some kind of stone that represents total power accumulation at the end of time. It's bouncing backwards through Time and Space, and the villains use the JLA and the Avengers respectively to go against each other, at different points in time, obviously with different pairings of the characters, to try to stop the others from getting the stone. The exact motivation was never clearly given in the plot. There was a motivation that was agreed upon between Gerry and myself, but it was

"I don't want to take the chance of going



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never written down in the plot. It probably would have turned up in the writing. **Roy Thomas** was supposed to do the scripting, based on Gerry's plot. The plot was not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but strictly as a visual story it had a hell of a lot of potential. When I was told that **Jim Shooter** had turned it down, it distressed me, but it was understandable.

DAK: *On a project like this — between Marvel and DC — who all has a say over it?*

GEORGE: According to the contract, **Shooter** as editor-in-chief — and obviously **Mark Gruenwald** as editor has to read it, and he'd have to approve it as well. But Jim's is the final word as far as Marvel is concerned. **Dick Giordano** and **Len Wein** had approval over it at DC. Dick did not exercise his option, and Len thought the plot was okay. At that point, Dick had not read it.

After it was rejected, in order to understand what was going on, he did read the plot. Not yet knowing what Jim's objections were, he saw a lot of things that he didn't understand and would have objected to. So Jim had a legitimate point. The big trouble was trying to specify *what* was wrong. Jim just sent a very short, curt letter, saying it was "unacceptable. Try again, guys." That was it — without dealing with the specifics, which was what we basically wanted. If the specifics could be ironed out, maybe the plot could be salvaged. If not, then we'd have to do another plot. The *really* big trouble started when I talked to **Len Wein** and we came up with a few ideas about correcting the plot. We suggested a few ideas that I was led to believe were discussed with either **Jim Shooter** or **Mark Gruenwald.** Now, by this time the book was already getting quite a bit behind schedule. So I had to have an answer immediately and DC gave me the go-ahead, saying that the plot should be okay, because basically everything had been discussed. All that had to be done was the formality of sending **Jim Shooter** a written plot. They told me to get started.

I had been drawing for two weeks and was already starting page 21, when I received a call from **Len Wein** saying they needed to find out what changes I was making in the plot. **Joey Cavalieri** had to do a piecemeal plot based on things I had changed — ideas, if not actual explanations — since I hadn't quite worked out everything as I was going along yet.

The new plot was submitted and Jim rejected it outright, with a letter saying basically that it was the same plot with no

through this political meatgrinder again."

changes. "Try again." Let's start from scratch, basically. Now, with 21 pages pencilled, I was obviously quite angry to find out that I had been working with no approval at Marvel's end — or at least **Jim Shooter's** end. I can't say *Marvel,* because there were people who knew that I was working on it. They had seen pages. And at that point, I was pretty angry.

I think it's a combination — that he did not receive a plot and things were being done behind his back, and that he actually didn't like the plot — that really started the trouble snowballing. This was in May of 1983. It took what seemed to me over a month just to get Jim to explain what were his objections. To write them out. He just wasn't *doing* anything at that point. It took Dick and Jim getting together to discuss it.

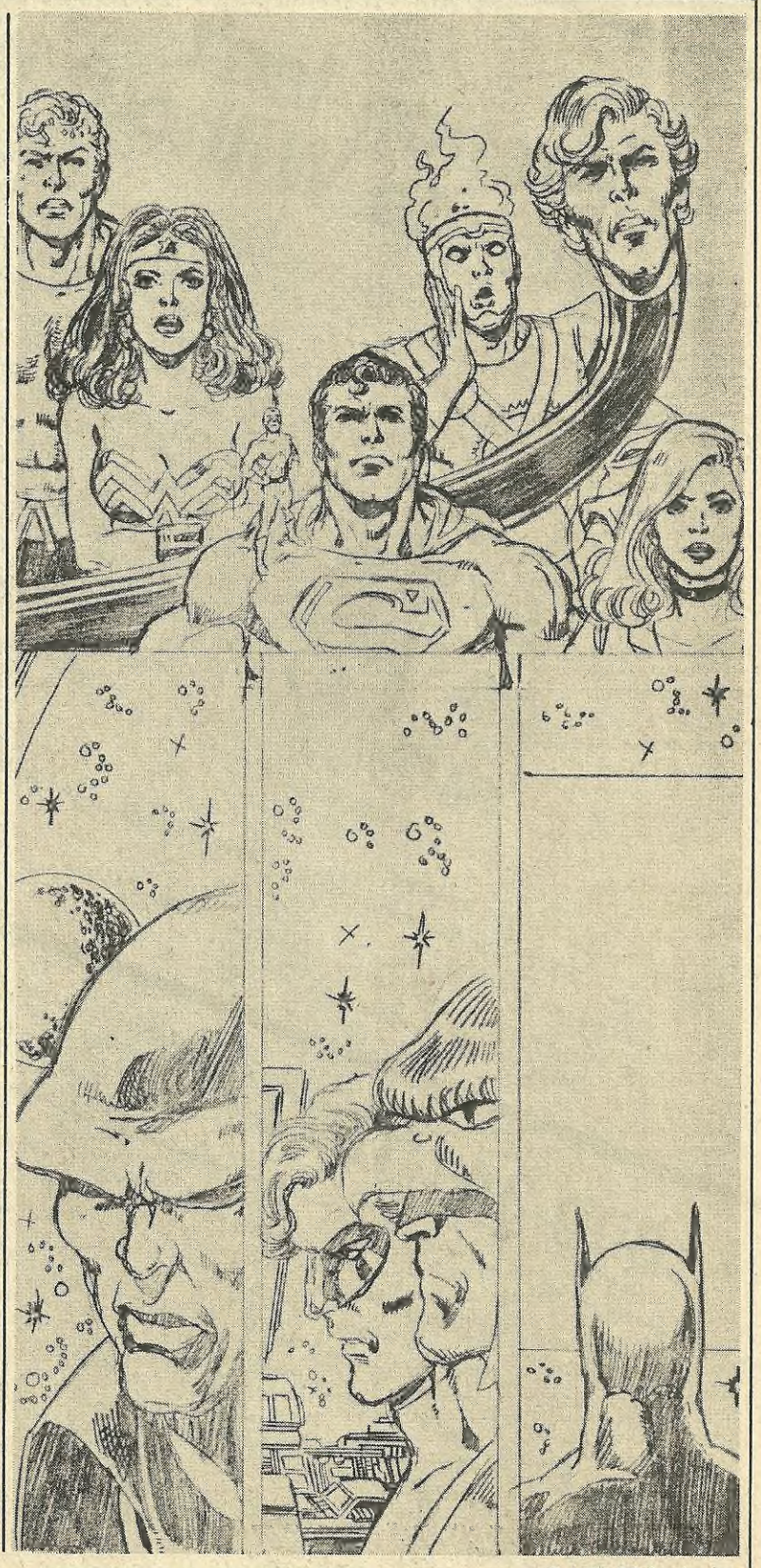
After finding out exactly what he objected to, it turned out these things were basically the same ones Dick and a number of editors at DC had by this time found. Starting from scratch was an unacceptable alternative, so **Roy Thomas** was then commissioned to do a new plot utilizing 21 pages already drawn and still make it all make sense.

A month ago, Roy sent in a treatment — not a plot — to Dick, that seemed to chart out a possible way to actually make a coherent storyline, giving motivation to the characters. Roy was then told to do a full plot — since a synopsis cannot explain everything — just to make sure that Jim would have no objections. Everything would be typed out for him, to say exactly why this is done, why that is done, what motivates everything, how it will end. So Roy did a plot, which I read. I was surprised as all hell that he actually managed to do it, using the already-drawn 21 pages, with what would come to maybe one or two pages worth of re-drawing.

It was submitted to **Jim Shooter.** And the days dragged by. Jim never seemed to have time to read it. If he had rejected it outright, I would have understood — if he didn't like it, fine. The thing that started to really bother me as time passed was that he hadn't gotten around to it.

Now, this is no minor league project. This is a major, major project. The idea of "not getting around to it" makes it seem like he's treating this like a reprint book.

In San Diego, I gave an ultimatum, if he doesn't give an answer by the end of the convention, then I have to get off the book. Dick convinced me, having talked to **Paul Levitz,** to wait a while longer. Obviously, this was a hell of a lot of money to be lost in a fiscal year. They were counting on projected profits, and to



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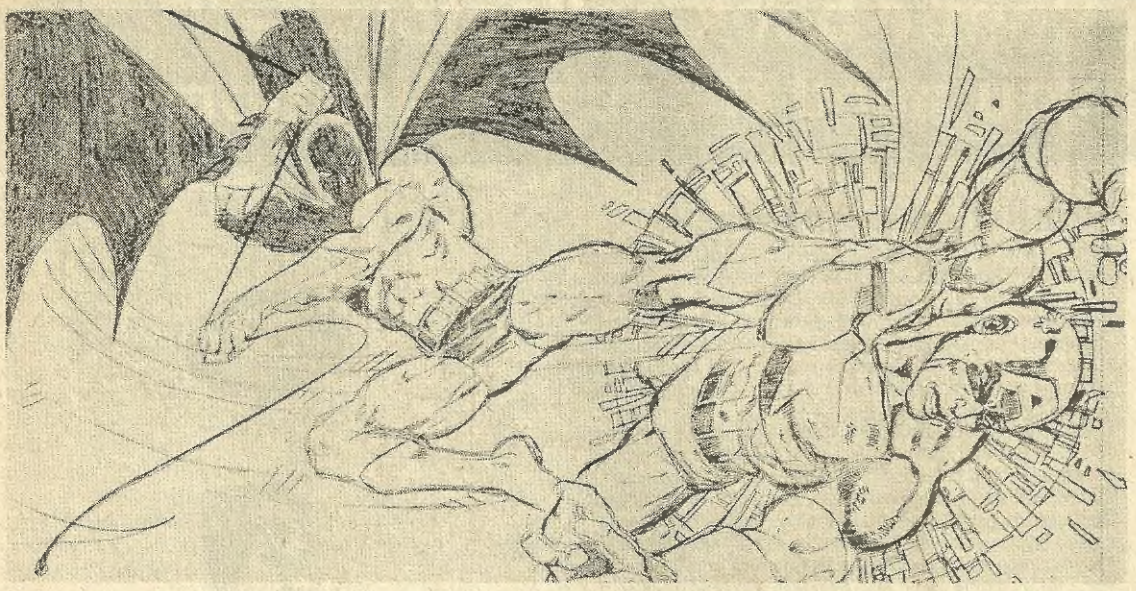
"The book was supposed to be out three months ago."



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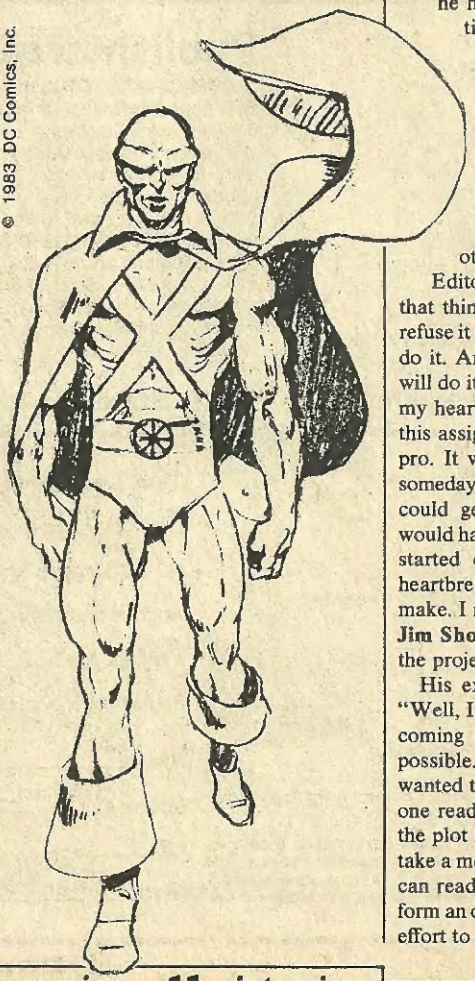
suddenly just yank it off the schedule was something they were quite concerned about. Jim stated to Dick that he had to show it to an editor — I assumed it was **Mark Gruenwald** — just to work out a few little things here and there. He said it seemed okay, but he wasn't going to make a final commitment. Unfortunately, as of yesterday, the 22nd of August, **Shooter's** still giving the same answer. Dick tried to contact him last Thursday. Instead, he talked to the secretary, who said Jim couldn't get to the phone at the time and didn't know when he'd be able to get back to Dick. Same thing happened yesterday. Dick gave him the word that if I had not gotten *some* answer — even a rejection, which I would have accepted — by 5:00, then I am off the book.

"Haven't gotten around to it, don't know when I'm going to be able to get back to you, it might be a few days." I was tired of that. I had heard that over and over and over again. The plot takes half an hour to read, and I'm not a fast reader. I couldn't believe that **Jim Shooter** did not have a half hour, or whatever really small amount of time it takes. Because the project is so important, take a half hour of your sleeping time — take an hour off from going to bed — get it done.

You know, it was incredibly tight, the book was supposed to be out three months ago. Granted, the plot wasn't approved the first time , but everything since then is because Marvel Comics — excuse me, **Jim Shooter** — has not done a single thing to help it along. He's procrastinated, ignored it, and actually made it seem that DC was the one that was constantly dragging their feet. But we couldn't make a single move without Jim exercising his power of accepting or rejecting. The fact that he wasn't even making a decision was the thing that finally did it. I mean, it was procrastination. A rejection, we could have accepted. But the idea that he has not even *bothered* to take the time to give us an answer was the thing that made me realize that I don't trust him any more. I gave Jim every benefit of the doubt. I was the last person who was not willing to accept the fact that this was being done on some level other than a professional level. As Editor-in-Chief, it was his duty to get that thing edited and either accept it or refuse it as quickly as possible. He did not do it. And I have no confidence that he will do it. I can't wait any more. It broke my heart. I had been looking forward to this assignment before I had even turned pro. It was a pipe dream, the idea that someday maybe the JLA and the Avengers could get together. I never thought it would happen. I lived for waking up to get started on those pages. It's the most heartbreaking decision I've ever had to make. I regret making it, but I don't trust **Jim Shooter.** I just don't think he wants the project done.



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His excuse — I can hear it already, "Well, I did not want an inferior product coming out. It had to be the best plot possible." Fine — I agree with that. I wanted the best plot possible, too, but in one reading you should be able to tell if the plot is acceptable or not. It does not take a month. I'm assuming **Jim Shooter** can read faster than a plot a month, and form an opinion. The fact that he made no effort to move things along proved to me

"This crossover thing has become a sham."

that this whole crossover thing has become an utter sham.

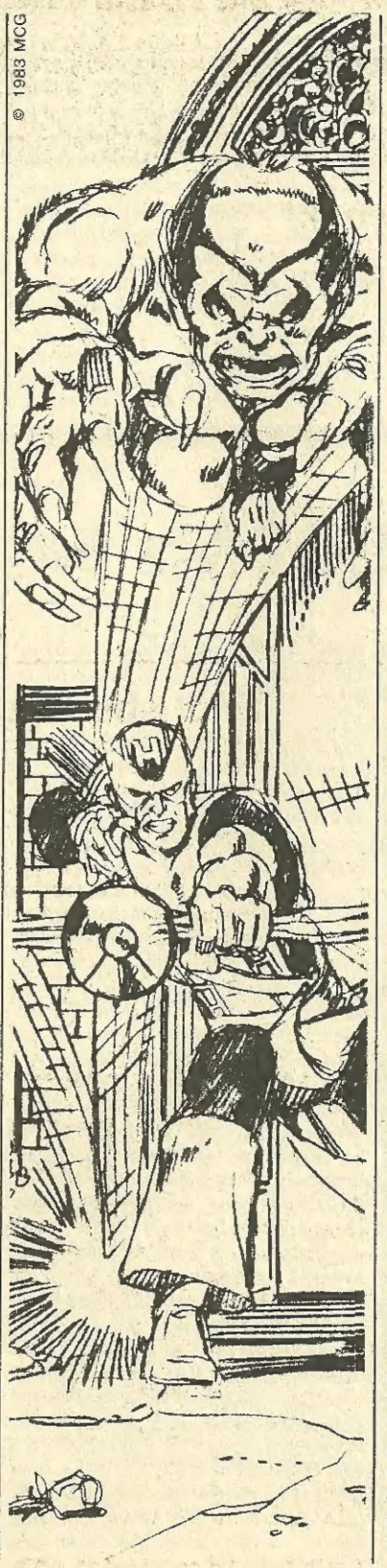
DAK: *How does this affect the X-MEN/TEEN TITANS crossover you were also going to do?*

GEORGE: I don't know — frankly, I don't care. I've already told **Marv Wolfman** and everyone involved that if that project falls apart, I won't care. I don't want to take the chance of going through this political meatgrinder again. I've had it affect me emotionally, physically. I was one of the few people who left Marvel with absolutely no disenchantment and no axe to grind. But I actually called **Al Milgrom** to turn down the last BLACK WIDOW cover, because as a point of principle I don't want to work there. I consider the Epic line a totally separate thing — I wouldn't worry about working for **Archie Goodwin.** I'd rather deal with someone I can trust, and Archie's never given me any reason not to trust him. Up until this point, neither had Jim. It's just become an incredible political thing, something I had hoped never to get involved in, hoping that all these horror stories I had heard about **Jim Shooter** were just exaggerations. As far as I'm concerned, Jim's personality has nothing to do with it. It's his ability as an Editor-in-Chief. If that's the way he treats a major, major project, then I wouldn't trust working on any project there.

DAK: *I must say, it really is a surprise to hear all this, because when I talked to Mark Gruenwald yesterday, he said, "Gee, it's OK with Jim, it's OK with me." I got the impression everything was proceeding in hunky-dory fashion.*

GEORGE: When I talked to Dick, his impression was that somebody else still had to read the plot. Now, if Mark has read it already, then I have no idea *who* it was. If Mark's the editor, and Jim's okayed it, then what the hell was the problem?

It could be revenge for the fact that the book was started without him. If that's so, it makes him sound incredibly petty. Again, the word "if." I'm not going to read his mind, I'm just going to give my impression. He did make a statement to **Dick Giordano** that when **Paul Levitz** had to approve his plot for the SUPERMAN/SPIDER-MAN story, the second one, that it took about three months for an approval to be made. Whatever Paul's reason, whatever bitterness that may have caused Jim, whether it's understandable or not, is beside the point. It's just unprofessional to let that mar your judgment. If he objected to **Paul Levitz's** doing it, then by doing it the same way, he's acting as unfairly as he believes Paul to have been acting.



DAK: *Have you talked to Jim at all about this?*

GEORGE: I haven't talked to him, because **Dick Giordano** felt that it was his responsibility to do so. As it turns out, **Len Wein** is no longer the editor of the book, and technically, as far as Dick knew, the actual editors dealing directly with it would be **Dick Giordano** and **Jim Shooter.**

Whatever his reason — whether it be petty, which is my impression, or just an incredible breakdown in the editorial system over at Marvel — if I had to work with their approval or his approval riding on it, I was not going to trust it any further.

They blew it! I mean, whether they want to accept the blame or not, I frankly don't care. I don't think — obviously, Marvel's not gonna — **Jim Shooter's** not gonna accept the blame. If he does, boy, it sure would be something for me to see.

If nothing else, this JLA/AVENGERS thing has taught me a very bitter lesson; never to do anything unless I get everything in front of me in writing, and never take anyone at his word. I will not do a project unless I, myself, have some amount of control over it, from here on in. And this is my exercise of control — I just won't draw the book. That puts me in the position — which is probably what Jim may have wanted — that it's DC's decision. This way, he has the excuse: He wanted a much better product, he wanted this to be really extra-special. But by waiting, and knowing my schedule was becoming too hard to handle it, knowing that **Dick Giordano's** schedule was getting way too hard to handle it — he won the victory, as far as he was concerned. If the project is cancelled due to the fact that I have gotten off the book, then the victory is his. As far as the technicalities are concerned, Jim is not at fault. You know, "It's George's decision. If you can't find someone to replace George, that's something we can't help. We can't help that his schedule can't permit it. He shouldn't commit himself if he can't handle it on his schedule." It would have been fine on my schedule, six months ago, the way it was supposed to have been.

The hell with all this nonsense! I've got other things I want to do. I may as well do a JUSTICE LEAGUE graphic novel; I've already got a plot idea. It may be crap. But at least it'll give me a fighting chance. People will tell me, "No, it stinks, don't do it," as opposed to, "Uhh . . .give me time." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *I don't think I've ever heard you*

PEREZ: "I have an emotional investment."

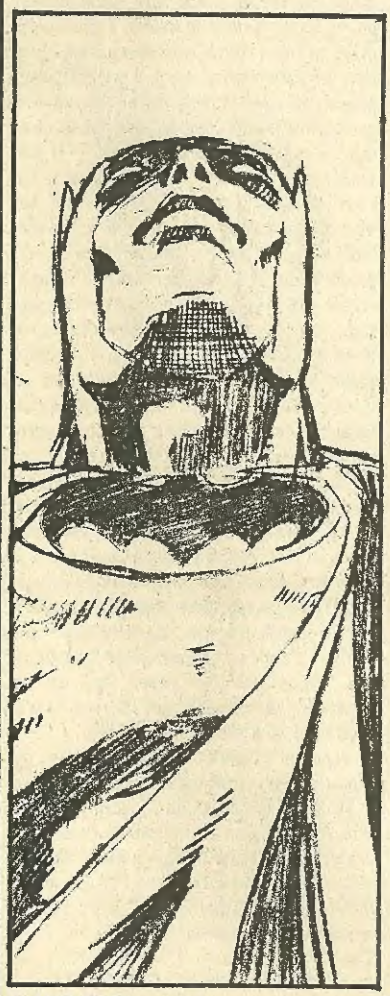
quite so exercised. Sounds like a real mess . . .

GEORGE: Oh, it's terrible. As far as I can see it's almost irreparable. It's done irreparable harm as far as the finances of both companies, which is really what confused the dickens out of me. You know, Marvel has gotten hurt by this. I don't think their credibility is being helped at all. The more Marvel made it sound like it was DC's fault, the less people believed them, from most of the reactions of the dealers that I've gotten. In fact, particularly since I have shown some of those pages to people. They've seen the pages and they've wondered what the hell was slowing things down. I mean, if he's counting on this project being letter perfect, then he should put a little more faith in the actual creative people. Despite all the flaws, I have faith that Roy would be able to put it together. I also have faith in my own storytelling ability. Whether Gerry had intended his plot simply as a skeletal thing with somebody else putting in all the reasoning — whether he had already discussed it with Roy, maybe — I don't know. But whatever the case, the notion of waiting for the Really Right Plot becomes rather subjective.

Granted, popular opinion was on his side. DC's own editors agreed with him as far as the flaws in Gerry's plot. So we *got* a new plot — and what's being done with it? Nothing.

"I'll get around to it," as he says. Well, if he wants to get around to it, let him get around to explaining to people why there is no JLA/AVENGERS book. It's not going to be a one-sided explanation. We're not gonna let the explanation put the blame all on DC — *I'm* not gonna allow it. If it means going public to express my view, just because I'm afraid it's going to get slanted — I will do it. I will not sit by and see something that I love very dearly made to seem an exercise in incompetence on the part of the side that I was working with.

ROY THOMAS says...



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DAK: *What's going on with the JLA/AVENGERS — are you still involved in the project?*

ROY THOMAS: Well, I'm still involved if there is a project. *(Laughter.)* As you know, **Gerry Conway** did a plot, which **Jim Shooter** didn't like. **Shooter** had some objections — some of them were doubtless valid, some of them maybe less so — but, you know, that's a matter of opinion. So Gerry rewrote the plot, slightly, trying to take into account what he thought were **Shooter's** objections. But this was before Jim had actually put anything down in writing. At that point, **Shooter** put a page or two of things in writing — I must say, somewhat insultingly — in a letter to **Dick Giordano.** Something like, "Okay, now let's have a *real* plot," and things of that sort. I thought a very unprofessional way of handling things. Dick elected not to even bother to show the letter to Gerry, figuring it would just cause bad blood between them. I had originally brought Gerry onto the project so that I wouldn't have to do any of the plotting. I hadn't really followed THE AVENGERS that closely in ten years, though I buy every issue and read some of them. JUSTICE LEAGUE I read somewhat more closely. I was feeling a little guilty about doing JLA/AVENGERS. Sure, I had written more AVENGERS than anybody else at DC, but at that time I had never written a full issue of JUSTICE LEAGUE. *(Laughter.)* Now, I've done one and a half or so. But Gerry has written it longer than anyone, including **Gardner Fox,** so I figured, well, why don't we team up on this, like we do with various film scripts, and I'll have Gerry plot it.

DC made the mistake of having **George Perez** draw about 20 pages before **Shooter** had seen Gerry's plot. When the plot was rejected, since Gerry didn't want to work on it anymore, I agreed for a flat fee — in order to help Dick — to revamp the plot using most of the material George had already drawn, and to change the plot to try to take **Shooter's** misgivings into account. And we came up with a plot that I think had a few differences. **Marv Wolfman, Len Wein,** Dick, and other people who read this new plot seemed to think it was considerably better. Or at least it dealt with **Shooter's** objections — I mean, whether it's better than Gerry's, I don't know.

At any rate, several weeks later, **Shooter** was, for all I could see, just sort of avoiding comment on it. I mean, Dick would try to call, and various things, and on some days he couldn't even get **Shooter** to come on the phone to discuss it. He would just say, "I need another few days." I don't know how long it takes Jim to read and comment on 17 pages of a stream-of-consciousness plot. And since I refused to work with him directly — I would work with him only through Dick — obviously I'm not in direct contact with him at all.

I have had some contact with **Mark Gruenwald** to check out a few continuity things, since Mark was the original Marvel editor who had approved, for the Marvel

THOMAS: "People ought to know what's going on."

Dick tried his damnedest. I tried my damnedest. **Roy** and **Dann Thomas**, giving credit where credit is due, did incredible wonders, or at least did their damnedest, to get a serviceable plot. If the plot is still unacceptable, fine. We gave it our best shot.

DAK: *Is there any way you'd change your mind — it seems a shame to just give up . . .*

GEORGE: I would ask for financial compensation, and I don't mean advances on royalties. I mean, more straight-out cash. I'm not going to be put through the emotional meatgrinder of this thing again — unless I am getting, instead of my regular rates, something more on a per-page bases. I don't want DC to do that —I think it's unfair that they be put in that position. They made a mistake — letting me do artwork before **Jim Shooter's** approval. The fact that they ended up paying for that mistake, closing in on four months now is something that I think is inexcusable. I have found work to take care of the gap — I have accepted two assignments from Pacific Comics. They're both short stories, which I would not have accepted had the JLA/AVENGERS gone through, but now that I've made a commitment to them, I'm not gonna turn them down. They have done absolutely nothing to show me that they were unreliable as far as getting the plots to me. When I mentioned I was interested in a plot, they had two plots to me within one week, from both **Roger McKenzie** and **Bruce Jones.** So I have absolutely no complaints there. They act upon opportunity very quickly.

Still, with all the things that went on, I know I have an emotional investment in the JLA/AVENGERS. I know when they say, "The thing is now available, the thing is ready to be drawn, do you still want to do it?" if it turns out to be only a few days later, it's going to be something that's going to tempt the hell out of me, deep down inside.

It is a special project.

side, the basic plot-line that Gerry did, only to have **Shooter** undercut him.

I don't understand. It's *one* thing not to like Gerry's plot — I can't argue if **Jim Shooter** doesn't like *my* plot. But the basic point seems to be that two or three weeks later, he was just not bothering to give it any kind of priority. I don't have any insight, as to why, except, of course, all the various things that have caused problems for **Shooter** — be it me, or Marv, or **Gene Colan,** or JLA/AVENGERS. Whatever or whomever Jim can't control, he doesn't seem to be very comfortable with. *(Laughter.)* And we tried to give him enough control and input on this, so I don't quite understand what his problem is.

I could face the rejection. I don't care, because it doesn't bother me much one way or the other whether this book gets done or not. If it does, I'd be happy to write, it — if it doesn't, I got paid for the plot. I'll lose some royalties but, on the other hand, I wouldn't have to do the work. Writing dialogue for all these characters will take a lot more research, so it's really six of one and half a dozen of the other. Whatever remissness there may have been on the part of Dick or DC at the start — by being overly eager about getting George started — there isn't any reason for **Shooter** to deliberately take so long.

Dick has been trying to get him to make a decision. Now there are calls going back and forth between people over Dick's and **Shooter's** heads. You know, it's gone to levels above **Shooter's** and **Giordano's** — and it still hasn't produced any definite word, as of today.

I think it's a shame that a comics company is run that way, but that's Marvel's fault. I'm no longer there, so I don't care. I just feel people ought to know what's going on.

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"ELFQUEST is a tough act to follow."

WENDY & RICHARD PINI

IN PART ONE: Wendy and Richard discuss the evil of Winnowill . . . ELFQUEST anthropology . . . production problems . . . rude fans . . . the fan who committed suicide. Here in Part Two of this interview by Freff, they tackle the loss of innocence . . . "independents" versus "genuine alternatives," and much more . . .

FREFF: *In #15 you put a warning to parents to look the issue over before reading it to small children. Do you find any pressure on you to change the ELFQUEST storyline to accomodate the fact that you now have attained a more heterogeneous audience?*

RICHARD: We have not received pressure to any great extent.

FREFF: *I wasn't so much asking whether you get pressure as whether you feel pressure.*

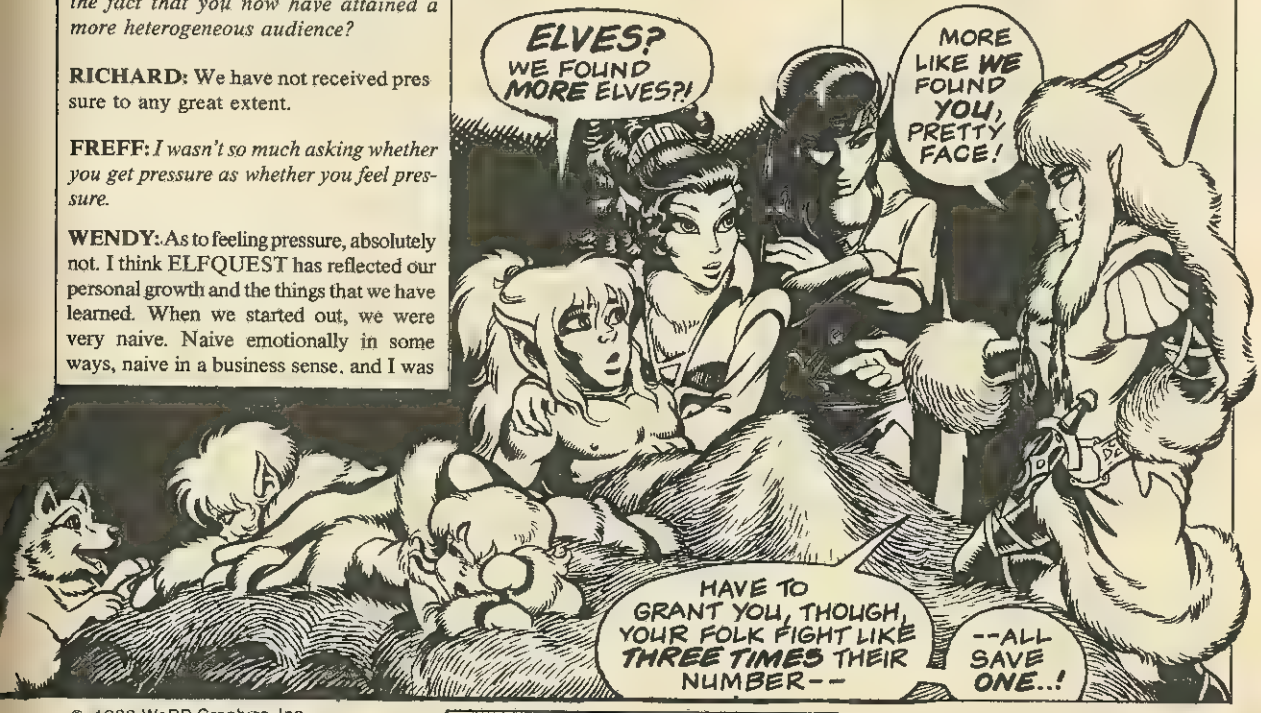
WENDY: As to feeling pressure, absolutely not. I think ELFQUEST has reflected our personal growth and the things that we have learned. When we started out, we were very naive. Naive emotionally in some ways, naive in a business sense, and I was certainly naive in an artistic sense. But Richard and I have grown a little older, a little wiser, a little less innocent — and so has ELFQUEST. As a matter of fact, very recently a fan commented to me that he objected to what happened between Tyldak and Dewshine, because he felt that we had lost some of the elfin innocence. I felt a little sad that he objected to that, because it seems to me that he was saying he wanted this character to remain static. "I don't want Dewshine to experience anything! She is whole and perfect as she is, and she musn't grow!"

RICHARD: That has probably been the biggest source of outside pressure — to remain static, and yet, even though we have known exactly how the story is going to go, still, the feel of ELFQUEST has evolved over the last six years, just as we have.

FREFF: *Let me ask you this. It is a question I ask myself, sometimes, since I am working on D'ARC TANGENT now. Knowing for as long as you have just how ELFQUEST is going to end, how do you manage to sustain interest over a span of years?*

RICHARD: It is sometimes difficult to maintain interest, because sometimes the work gets hard, and sometimes we both run into blocks. But knowing the plot for every issue is quite different from putting the words into all the characters' mouths, with all of their little quirks, or putting all of their images down on paper with all of the wonderful and marvelous facial expressions. Bits of business come out in the actual doing of the book that simply cannot be present in just knowing the plot of that issue. Since that has maintained for sixteen issues, that interest will certainly hold out for another four.

FREFF: *And yet, I remember Wendy mentioning something to me about a panel in #16 that was actually done ages ago, because you didn't think that you could hold onto the emotions . . .*


ELVES? WE FOUND MORE ELVES?!
MORE LIKE WE FOUND YOU, PRETTY FACE!
HAVE TO GRANT YOU, THOUGH, YOUR FOLK FIGHT LIKE THREE TIMES THEIR NUMBER--
--ALL SAVE ONE..!

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"I want the emotions to be very real,

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Cutter speared by a Troll. From ELFQUEST #15.

WENDY: Yes. It is a panel of Cutter and Skywise, who is trying to stanch his wound with a handful of snow. It is a very emotional thing, especially for two male characters, to be that close and have that much love between them — with no words, but just showing it in the picture — and I did that drawing practically before we did the script for issue #1. I felt the scene very strongly at the time, and I had a premonition things could get so complicated that I might not have the emotional energy to render it without the sentimentality that might come.

It is funny. When you have a highly emotional scene in mind for a long time and it finally comes time to put it down on paper, if your own emotions aren't connected with it, you could fall back on sentimentality or certain cliches to get it across. I've always been very afraid of that, particularly when the emotions are running very high in ELFQUEST. I also want the emotions to be very real, very immediate, just like the Wolfriders. That's why I saved the drawing.

FREFF: *So seven years ago you knew that you were going to put a hole in poor Cutter's abdomen?*

WENDY: Right. That is to make way for the pencil sharpener. It is a merchandising ploy. *(Laughter.)*

FREFF: *Obviously, you've now got the "lips of silence" part down pat but, in the early days, did you ever slip? Did you ever reveal a secret plot-twist when someone asked, "You don't really have this whole thing plotted out, do you?"*

RICHARD: Even back then, we knew we wanted to present ELFQUEST in such a way that each chapter built on the chapter that had gone before. We knew we had surprises, and certain things depend upon surprise, and so we never did slip. We've gotten very good at tap-dancing — we've refined our skills at evading questions. The problem with that, of course, has been that people come along who say, "you're making it up as you go along." As proof to the contrary, we can point to a cover done over five years ago for the ROCKET'S BLAST COMIC COLLECTOR, a fanzine. It portrays essentially the final panel of issue #15. When Wendy did that drawing, she knew exactly what that scene was going to be like.

WENDY: Someone in the COMICS JOURNAL accused us of taking ideas from readers in our letter columns and sticking them into ELFQUEST.

RICHARD: He got it exactly backwards! Since I do the letters pages, and I like to have as varied a mix of opinions and whatever as I can, I will publish some letters predicting events happening in that issue, which readers could not possibly have known about. And he is taking it that, well, we got the letter and then created that issue. Which is not the case. He got it backwards.

WENDY: He was not giving the fans credit. They are damned smart. They are great detectives, and we love dropping clues. Some of the guesses have been very, very good — but with all the side-stepping and red-herrings and so forth, we have managed to stay one step ahead of the fans

Skywise stanching the wound. From ELFQUEST #16

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very immediate, just like the Wolfriders."

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YOUR QUEST HAS NEARLY DESTROYED THE WOLFRIDERS, TAM, MY CHIEF-SON...
NO! I KNEW WHAT WAS RIGHT! I ORDERED THEM TO STAY IN THE WOODS! THEY SHOULD HAVE OBEYED!

A wounded Cutter hallucinates. From ELFQUEST #16.

in terms of the plot. No one so far, good as their guesses have been, has managed to outguess us yet. We feel very happy about that.

FREFF: *At this point, I can leap in with my wild guess that Cutter is "The Other."*

RICHARD: Right, right, right. And he has a twin sister. *(Laughter.)*

FREFF: *A question concerning the history of ELFQUEST: Now it is well and fine and I believe thoroughly that you had all these events planned out, in gashing poor Cutter, and killing Lord Voll, and all of the other horrible and nasty things that you have done . . .*

WENDY: I love this line of questioning.

FREFF: *. . . but how about the background universe? How well do you know what else there is on this planet, aside from these four groups of elves? There must be others. Do you have conjectures about them? Do you ever plan to do stories about them?*

WENDY: It is kind of a misty path, the past of the Wolfriders, and many people have written to ask about their former chiefs and so forth. This segues nicely into explaining some of the other projects that we have in mind, aside from ELFQUEST. The comic will have an ending, but WaRP Graphics will not, and will go beyond the three-times-a-year comic.

RICHARD: Ever since we made the announcement that ELFQUEST ends with issue #20, we've gotten frenzied letters saying, "Don't let it end," "Keep it going," and so forth. People seem to have misinterpreted us. ELFQUEST won't sink beneath the waves with #20. It is just that we'll take a rest from doing it three times a year, as a comic book. One of the projects we want to do right after ELFQUEST ends is a storybook called BLOOD OF TEN CHIEFS. It will have ten chapters, each of which will be about one of the ten chiefs of the Wolfriders, right up to Bear Claw.

FREFF: *Will the book be prose or a graphic novel?*

RICHARD: It will be very much like the old Hastings House PRINCE VALIANT books. It will consist of text most likely written by Wendy and myself, she will do four-color illustrations, and it will be bound as a storybook.

FREFF: *Obviously, you are not going to make the impact you have with ELFQUEST and then fold your tents and go away, just because this particular story is finished. I know that you have plans to*

"We have grown a little less innocent."

bring out new comics. So what are you springing on us?

RICHARD: Well, one of the things that I found out in doing ELFQUEST is that I like publishing . . .

FREFF: *It is insidious, isn't it?*

RICHARD: Yes. It gets in the blood. And we do want to launch a couple of other comic magazines in the ELFQUEST format, one of them an original science-fiction story. Another one is based on the **Bob Aspen** MYTH BOOK. And in addition to the magazine publishing, we want to try our hand at a couple of books such as a STORMBRINGER book, which will be a compilation of the couple of hundred drawings and paintings that Wendy did based on **Michael Moorcock's** STORMBRINGER.

WENDY: I think we should explain that. It is kind of bizarre just to say there are a couple of hundred paintings.

FREFF: *I bet you knocked them out on a Saturday afternoon!*

WENDY: The STORMBRINGER project was, in brief, something I was working on towards the end of my senior year in high school and then in college. It was supposed to be an animated film, and I more or less geared all my college classes around it. A great amount of work was done. It was prohibitive for one person, but I think it was good for me to learn my own limitations, working on such a massive project, so I could set my sights just a little more realistically. So, naturally, I went into ELFQUEST. *(Laughter.)*

RICHARD: Much more realistic!

WENDY: There are hundreds of paintings, cels, sketches, character designs and painted backdrops for this animated film. They will be compiled into a coffee-table type book which will also contain text that will describe the project, my feelings about doing it, what went wrong and what went right. It will have a bit of a philosophical bent.

RICHARD: One of the things Wendy wants to do when ELFQUEST is done, of course — is to get about as far away from the pressures of regular publishing as possible and back into doing painting and illustration.

WENDY: This doesn't mean that ELFQUEST will die, by any stretch of the imagination. We are discussing things that we can do beyond the completion of the comic series — annuals, possibly, or short stories inserted in other publications by WaRP Graphics. These are just under discussion, without anything specifically planned yet.

FREFF: *How is the film doing?*

WENDY: Oh, well — what can we say? The film is going and yet it isn't. Nelvana Studios has just completed ROCK & RULE, their first full-length feature film. They are encountering difficulties with distributors, and there is some doubt about whether they will be able to get it released into theatres at all. It may end up on cable, just as **Ralph Bakshi's** FIRE AND ICE is going to. And this is a serious blow to Nelvana.

RICHARD: It is a serious blow to animation, in general. Animation has not, over the years, enjoyed the popularity or the financial success that it used to, especially in the **Disney** heyday. There hasn't been a really successful animated film in the last bunch of years.

WENDY: Since **Walt Disney** died.

RICHARD: And what is happening with Nelvana right now is that we have an image of the studio akin to what happens when you kick over an anthill. They are running around somewhat frantically trying to do everything that they can to see that ROCK & RULE gets the attention and the distribution that they and we feel it deserves. We have seen parts of the film and the animation is absolutely superb. We don't know enough about the story, except what we've seen in the Marvel Comics adaptation, to tell you how well the story translates onto film. Traditionally, Nelvana has generated all of their animated film stories in-house; ELFQUEST is the first story that has come to them from the outside. We are in a state of cautious concern right now about how well ROCK & RULE does and what Nelvana thinks about it, because right now animation is at a pivotal point. It could keep going, or it may be dealt a blow from which it could take some time to recover.

WENDY: That may be a blacker picture than has to be painted, because there are many, many options for us. It is not a question of "if" ELFQUEST will be made into a film, it is more a question of "when." Because not only Nelvana, but three other animation studios have made offers to option ELFQUEST. So we are in no difficulty in terms of having options, should the unthinkable happen. We want Nelvana very much to do the film, but if for some reason they can't, we have options that are perhaps equally pleasant. Getting ELFQUEST filmed is not what we are concerned about. We are concerned mostly about the distribution, and one advantage we have is that whereas something like ROCK & RULE does not have an automatic, ready-made audience (they were hoping to appeal to the video-game/pot-smoking/acid-rock crowd) there is a definite and very large ELFQUEST fandom which will go to see the film, much the same as there is a STAR TREK fandom that will go to see the STAR

Cutter vows vengeance. From ELFQUEST #16.

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"Direct-sales must not be underestimated."

TREK movies. We have that advantage, that selling point with the distributors.

FREFF: *Given ELFQUEST's success, do you feel the slightest trepidation about doing these aforementioned new projects in the shadow of ELFQUEST?*

RICHARD: Well, yes and no. Realistically, we know that ELFQUEST is a tough act to follow. But as publisher I don't feel necessarily that I am following ELFQUEST. Two cents worth of publishing philosophy here: I want to publish things that make me feel the way that ELFQUEST does. There are quantifiable aspects to ELFQUEST that you can look at and say, "Yeah, this is one of the things that makes ELFQUEST different and interesting." I am of the conviction that there are other projects, other stories out there, that are also interesting and different — not in the same way as ELFQUEST, but in similar ways. And I want to launch those projects. I want to give them their chance. I want to stick with them. If they only build up to a certain point — say, in circulation — and we consider ELFQUEST to be a great success and one of these other projects only becomes a moderate success, that is okay. Because I believe a project will rise to its own level. As long as everything is attended to the same as we are attending to ELFQUEST, then I am doing what I want to do, and there is no spirit of competing with ELFQUEST.

FREFF: *Let's talk about business. Just a few years ago, there was an attempt to put a guild together in comics that would fight for the rights of the creators and try to get royalties and copyrights. Now, all of a sudden, there are royalties for people working for DC and Marvel; there are creator books; there are these independent books done specifically for the direct-sales marketplace; and so on. the direct-sales marketplace; and so on.*

RICHARD: You can trace independent comics as far back, at least, as the early '60s. And I am not talking about undergrounds, I am talking about the ground level — things like STAR-STUDDED COMICS — but I think that you'd have to say that **Jack Katz'** FIRST KINGDOM and also STAR* REACH, **Mike Friedrich's** book, were the first recognizable, widely-distributed (for that time) independent ground-level comics. ELFQUEST and CEREBUS came later and from that point, I think you can trace not only a growth in the overall circulation of these alternative books, but also a growth in the number of the direct-sales shops. In '75 or '76 there were very few, and now there are literally thousands. And I think that our growth, and the growth of the shops, goes hand in hand.It was that economic growth that has allowed publishers like Pacific and First and all of the rest of the independents to be able to offer the kind of money or deals to attract people who were disgruntled with the mainstream comics. Which then had the domino effect of getting the mainstream companies to look at their policies and say. "Hey, we better revise our contracts if we want to be competitive."

WENDY: I think the importance of the direct-sales shops cannot and must not be underestimated. Had we not had that outlet for ELFQUEST, where in the world would we have sold it? When we started, we were fortunate enough to know two distributors who were willing to take a chance on us —**Bud Plant** and **Phil Seuling.** And Phil, of course, as

Left: pencil-sketch for cover of ELFQUEST #16. Right: Finished art.

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"It's sometimes difficult to retain interest."

should be rightly known, was a major influence both in direct sales and in getting alternatives off the ground to begin with. Had these shops not existed, what then would have been our marketplace? Both Marvel and DC rejected us as not having enough commercial potential. Other existing alternative publishers rejected us, too, because they weren't willing to take a chance on something that was so different and so strange.

RICHARD: We would have been in the position of every other fanzine and independent comic up until that point. We would have taken out ads in other fanzines and sold several hundred copies, maybe. It is going to be very interesting to us, personally, and hopefully to the rest of the comics industry as well, to see what happens now as a result of the burgeoning of the independent comics. Two or three years ago, there were a handful of companies. Now there are many, and a lot of them are publishing books as good in production values as mainstream comics, in four colors, usually with higher quality paper, and occasionally with higher-quality printing. Yet looking, for all the world exactly like mainstream comics.

WENDY: This is why we feel that it is wrong to call these four-color companies "alternatives." They might better be referred to as "independents," but they are not really alternatives in their subject matter.

RICHARD: Wendy has a point. There are not that many true alternative comics. I define "alternative" as those who are doing something *different* from what comics have been doing for so long.

WENDY: I think we mustn't forget **Wallace Wood's** WIZARD KING, which was aborted by his tragic death — also an alternative comic of some note, because it was his personal vision. I think what makes genuine alternatives distinct from independently published comics is a singularly strong personal vision on the creator's part — a desire to tell a story that is very personal to that creator, and not necessarily to create a character that might have wide, mass appeal or a plot containing all the familiar elements of STAR WARS or whatever is currently successful. Certainly in the category of the true alternatives, Freff, I would list your own wonderful book D'ARC TANGENT, ELFQUEST (of course), **Dave Sim's** very remarkable CEREBUS, **Jack Katz'** FIRST KINGDOM — a monumental effort on his part — RAW, and some of the things that Fantagraphics is doing.

RICHARD: There is a distinct difference,

Pencil-Sketch of Ekuar.

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"What makes a genuine alternative

we feel, between these and the independent four-color comics.

WENDY: I am not saying that these others shouldn't exist. There is room for everybody. Some very high-quality stuff is coming out of the independents, even though they resemble mainstream comics more than the true alternatives do. We are a little elitist in our preference for something that is a bit more unusual and a bit more personal in vision and scope.

FREFF: *What about the economic structure of the field? It has grown precipitously over the last few years, and that makes some people scared.*

RICHARD: It is an interesting thing to watch. In the case of anything that grows as fast as the independent/alternative comics industry has in the last couple of years, I perceive a potential for the limit to be reached and a bust to occur. I don't know what the economy is going to be doing next year or five years from now — but whatever the *economy* does has got to have an effect on what *we* do. There is one scenario which occurs to me, in which more and more people put out more and more products, there comes a scramble for shelf space in the stores, and people just get tired of it all. That has happened in mainstream comics before and could happen with the new publishers, ourselves included. Which is one reason — going back to what I said earlier —we would rather publish the things I want to publish and reach the people who are interested. I'd rather maintain a moderate level of success than try to bust the bank with seven or ten or fifteen different titles, spread myself too thin, and not be able to devote the time and caring to them that I think they deserve.

WENDY: I think EPIC Magazine will be a trend in the future, wherein you can work for a mainstream company and receive the benefits of exposure and payment and so forth connected with working for a mainstream company, while at the same time maintaining full rights to your creation. In a sense, it might be a very happy compromise to the whole issue.

FREFF: *Only you two have known how the story is gong to end all along. But now the movie people have a treatment, so supposedly you had to tell them the end of the story. What kind of security do you have against "loose lips"?*

RICHARD: We have their children on an island. We are treating them well, but if there are any slips . . . We sent them copies of issues #1 through #15, so they got the story directly from the comics for those, and Wendy then wrote out a fairly extensive treatment for the last five issues, because obviously they have to know the entire story.

WENDY: According to **Mike Hirsh** they have written a couple of treatments based on our complete outline — neither of which they liked very much. So we are still waiting to receive something from

them. The fans are going to have to adjust to the idea that the ELFQUEST movie is not going to contain every single incident that is in the comics, and may even contain a lot of *new* material that might not appear in the comics or the novel. The requirements of filmic storytelling are quite different from those of prose or the graphic novel.

RICHARD: People have commented on the difference between the comics and the novel — two methods of expression — and an animated film is a third, totally different method. So there are going to be changes made, things put in and left out. It will be ELFQUEST — it will just be a different expression of ELFQUEST.

FREFF: *So we have had ELFQUEST, the comic book, the novel and, upcoming, the movie. When do we get ELFQUEST, the radio serial, the Broadway play, and the boxtop?*

RICHARD: You want to agent for us?

FREFF: *I am just curious about whether you have gotten any interest from other media.*

WENDY: The moment ELFQUEST started to take off, the moment it started to be acknowledged as something of a success and the fan publications picked up on it, we began to hear from everyone — ranging from a guy who makes hats with visors who wanted to put Cutter on the hat and the name "Tolkien" on the visor, to people who wanted to make little ceramic figures that could be made up in mass quantities and painted to taste. A variety of private enterprises have approached us with various and sundry ideas, ranging from the ridiculous to the sublime.

FREFF: *What is your favorite ridiculous one? Elfburgers, right?*

WENDY: Well, I think the **Tolkien** one was the most ridiculous. He wanted the image of Cutter to advertise his **Tolkien** hat.

RICHARD: What the heck, all elves are alike, right? We did get a request for painted eggs. That would probably have to be the most bizarre. Mostly, it has been people wanting to do statues or prints or leather work or ceramics or things of that nature. But we have to be very careful about opening the floodgate if we say yes to one, so we are very careful about the licensing. We have licensed a game, and we have licensed the figures to go along with the game. There is in all likelihood, going to be a computer-graphic adventure game based on ELFQUEST.

FREFF: *A twofold question. Part one: Has it been worth it? And part two: What is the meaning of life?*

RICHARD: The meaning of life is that you look it up in a dictionary (I read that in a story). Has it been worth it?

WENDY: I think that question shouldn't be asked until it is all done. One of the trepidations we have is that we *know* the ending of ELFQUEST, while all the fans out there have their private imaginings of what is going to happen —and if the ending that Richard and I have come up with, which is very personal to us, doesn't satisfy people, then this could be quite an eight year fiasco in the commercial sense. But not in the personal sense.

RICHARD: It could not possibly be a fiasco for us, because we have told the story we wanted to tell. We will be able to bind all twenty issues into a big thick book, and we can think, "We did it, and we did it our way." So, in certain well-

comic is a strong personal vision."

defined senses, yes, it has been worth it — because we have learned a lot of things about art, publishing, people, ourselves . . .

WENDY: No question.

RICHARD: And we are going to continue to do that

WENDY: If you are going to be in this line of work, you have a responsibility to learn about yourself and about your own motivations for what you are doing — 'cause sloppy thinking leads to sloppy work. I've always wished, for instance, that I could recapture the innocence, the *naivete* that I had when I first started this project. But, most of the time, I wouldn't trade what I've learned, what I've been through — the ups and downs, the flack that I've had to take from all sorts of different sources that I didn't imagine existed. I wouldn't trade it for anything. It has made me stronger. It has made me much more of a professional. For instance, the controversy that issue #15 raised, we didn't expect at all. Some people said we blew it, some said it was perfect, some were scared by it, some cried all the way through it. There were so many different points of view — a whole spectrum of emotions. Because that happened I am now able to sit back and say to myself, "If people hate it, fine. If they love it, fine." It is one more jump in professionalism for me not to get uptight over what people think.

FREFF: *I can't think of anything more to ask.*

WENDY: What about the meaning of life?

FREFF: *Well, Richard answered that — you haven't yet.*

WENDY: Have you got any embroidery on your answer, Richard?

RICHARD: I was thinking of something somebody said, I think it was something way back in one of **Steve Gerber's** comic books, "Work hard, play hard, and be fair."

WENDY: Right now, we know about working. We don't know about playing. I think that will come after it's over.

FREFF: *How about you, Wendy? It's partly a frivolous question, "What is the meaning of life?" — but part of it is sincere. What about something that is close to the heart? What do you use to keep yourself going?*

WENDY: Every time you get kicked in the teeth you have two options: You fold, or you get stronger. And I find that getting stronger, or getting on to the next fight, is what it is all about for me. I have given a lot of thought to issues of feminism, and my place in the scheme of things. Taking it back to the beginning of the interview, I think I am the first woman to do a project like this in the comics field. There are people, I think, who have been cutting their teeth on me — critics, women, men, too. I have been alone. I know I won't be for long. Other women will come up and do their thing, too. But I enjoy it. I enjoy the challenge, I enjoy asking myself questions and trying to find answers. I enjoy seeing how much I can take, and how much I have to give. It just makes me feel very good. Optimistic. And if it also means something to somebody else, that is wonderful, too.

From first ELFQUEST portfolio.

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"I'd love to novelize BLOOM COUNTY."

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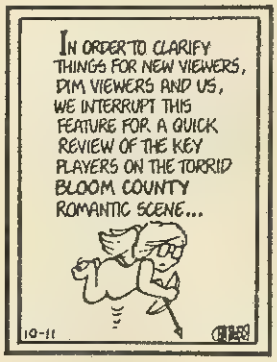
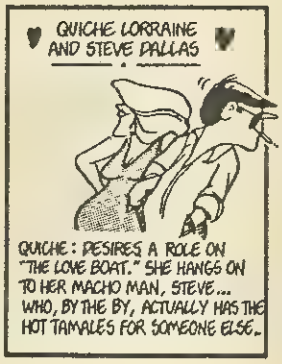
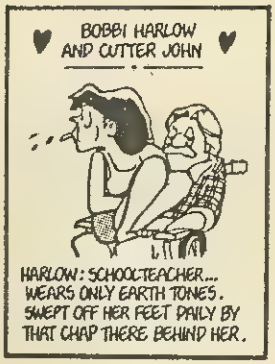
Berke Breathed is suddenly one of the best known cartoonists in the country. As the creator of BLOOM COUNTY, a comic strip that skillfully blends the whimsy of Dr. Seuss with the social commentary of DOONESBURY, Breathed was the biggest beneficiary of Garry Trudeau's recent sabbatical. When DOONESBURY ended last fall, the number of papers carrying BLOOM COUNTY doubled in less than a month, leaping from just under 200 to a healthy 408 — which Berke says puts his strip in the upper three or four percent.

Overnight success did throw Breathed a little off balance. He confesses to being slightly embarrassed at having spent so little time paying his dues, and hedges at injecting his politics into BLOOM COUNTY. But his opinions do manage to sneak out. Talking with a rapid, vaguely Midwestern accent, Berke is much like his strip — articulate, pointed and often very funny . . .

"There's no other strip right now that offers


IN ORDER TO CLARIFY THINGS FOR NEW VIEWERS, DIM VIEWERS AND US, WE INTERRUPT THIS FEATURE FOR A QUICK REVIEW OF THE KEY PLAYERS ON THE TORRID BLOOM COUNTY ROMANTIC SCENE...
10-11


QUICHE LORRAINE AND STEVE PALLAS
QUICHE: DESIRES A ROLE ON "THE LOVE BOAT." SHE HANGS ON TO HER MACHO MAN, STEVE... WHO, BY THE BY, ACTUALLY HAS THE HOT TAMALES FOR SOMEONE ELSE.


BOBBI HARLOW AND CUTTER JOHN
HARLOW: SCHOOLTEACHER... WEARS ONLY EARTH TONES. SWEPT OFF HER FEET DAILY BY THAT CHAP THERE BEHIND HER.

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JIM MASSARA: *Do you have a lot of trouble with your name?*

BERKE BREATHED: Today, I got a letter addressed to "Bruce Breethet," which is about the worst I've ever seen. It's interesting to note that it wasn't until I started doing this syndicated strip that anyone had trouble with it. What strikes me as unusual is that a good quarter of my mail is addressed to *Ms.* Berke Breathed. I can't imagine a woman named Berke.

JIM: *It is kind of unusual, sort of an '80s-ish name, like Lance.*

BERKE: Actually, I can't think of a woman named "Lance," either. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *I've noticed in most of your strips your name is signed backwards. why do you sign your name backwards?*

BERKE: There's a very small, insignificant private reason why I do that, which I won't explain.

JIM: *Why not?*

BERKE: It's a private reason, just an inside joke with myself. A private protest.

JIM: *How many papers are carrying BLOOM COUNTY now?*

BERKE: At last count, a little over 400 — that's daily and Sunday papers and college papers, all together.

JIM: *How does that stack up to something like GARFIELD?*

BERKE: Well, nothing stacks up to GARFIELD, which is one of the most widely-distributed strips in history, so we all kind of pale in comparison to that. GARFIELD is carried in about 1000 papers, so we're doing pretty good at 400. BLOOM COUNTY is making money for everybody concerned, and that's what the definition of a successful experiment in cartooning is. They all start out as experiments, as far as the industry is concerned. Most of them do not make it. You'll see maybe 50 to 75 new strips introduced each year. Maybe a handful are going to be there next year. That's how tough the business is. Plus, there's about 250 strips available today, and the bulk of them are in under 75 newspapers.

JIM: *What is the break-even point for a strip?*

BERKE: I think I was told 50 newspapers.

JIM: *Has the rate of the strip being picked up by papers increased any since DOONESBURY went into hibernation?*

BERKE: Oh, sure. Naturally, that was a windfall for any new strip coming out, because it opened up a hole in 700-some newspapers. Chances are I was already in most of the major papers, so it's not like I was going to get into all these new papers that I never would have gotten into before. After you get maybe the first 100 cities – major cities — there's basically the small-town papers. That's where it opened up a lot, and we've picked up maybe 200 new contracts. So probably, in all honesty, that's substantially more than any new strip, just with that DOONESBURY deal. There's no other strip right now that offers any contemporary satirical comment.

JIM: *How do you feel about being compared to DOONESBURY?*

BERKE: It's just inevitable — something that's happened ever since I put pen to paper — so it's certainly nothing new. And everyone's always embarrassed to ask about it. I don't know why. Obviously, I've been influenced by **Gary Trudeau,** but people seem to overlook the fact that, really, in concept and in style of humor, you could trace my roots back to more irreverent forms of humor, even back to Dr. Seuss, I think. But people tend to ignore that, just because I don't put balloons around my lettering, and that makes it look like DOONESBURY.

JIM: *That was my initial reaction when I first saw BLOOM COUNTY in the papers.*

BERKE: That's everybody's initial reaction. But, fortunately, after a couple of months, that image is just dispelled, and I pick up an entirely different audience than DOONESBURY has — for whatever reason, I don't know, but it seems to be separate.

JIM: *Well, you seem to be more whimsical than Trudeau.*

BERKE: "Goofy" is the word. A good journalist's word would be, uh . . .

JIM: *Irreverent?*

BERKE: Yeah, irreverent.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Berke Breathed (rhymes with "method")
Occupation: Syndicated cartoonist
Residence: Iowa
Born: June 1957
Credits: THE ACADEMIA WALTZ, a college strip that appeared in THE DAILY TEXAN (1978-1980) and of course, BLOOM COUNTY.
Training: Photojournalism — no formal art background.
Tools Of The Trade: Osmiroid pens and all sorts of other art pens.
Time A Strip Takes: About an hour and a half — if I already have the idea.
Pet Peeve: Journalism school. Three quarters of the people on the newspaper staff at THE DAILY TEXAN had never taken a journalism course, and they were usually better than the others.

any satirical contemporary comment."

JIM: *That's a good one, too. But my initial reaction was that I didn't like BLOOM COUNTY on general principle, because I thought, "Here's a DOONESBURY clone." Yet the more I read it, the more I liked it . . .*

BERKE: Well, I'm happy to say that your experience seems to be fairly common, although I'm sure the hardcore DOONESBURY fans are offended that anyone is even trying to trample on social commentary turf.

JIM: *Well, I find BLOOM COUNTY differs from DOONESBURY in that the satire strikes me as broader. There is social satire, but it seems more general and not really aimed at any one thing in particular.*

BERKE: My whole aim is *not* to stick my personal narrow point of view into the strip.

JIM: *Why not?*

BERKE: Because I have no business doing so. I'll tell you when it *did* get through (sometimes I can't help it). A typical example is a recent Sunday I did where, at the end of it, I took a poke at creationism. I won't go through the cartoon, but it ended with the sentence, "and this nonsense was brought to you by the Institute for Creation Research." Well, I shouldn't have said "nonsense." The point would have been made without it. It wasn't necessary, and an awful lot of people complained. I don't mind people complaining, but I don't want to unnecessarily step on people's toes.

The power that I or any other cartoonist has to shoot off his mouth must be wielded with a great deal of care and concern. And learning how to harness it and rein it in and let it go at just the appropriate time is a difficult thing and often takes a considerable amount of experience — which most of us, since we're only working one cartoon a day, take some bit of time to accumulate. My opinion isn't any more important than anybody else's out there. But, if I'm satirical, I can use my power to point out the absurdities of a situation, and maybe make some things clear that weren't necessarily clear to everyone before. Not meaning that I have any more of a shortcut to the truth than anybody else, but I do have a way to make people examine it, and maybe think or talk about it. But that's, of course, making it all seem a lot more serious than it is.

JIM: *One thing that struck me as interesting is the character, Cutter John. Is there any particular reason for him being in a wheelchair?*

BERKE: He's disabled, that's why he's in a wheelchair.

JIM: *That's an unusual choice of something to do with a character in a funny strip.*

BERKE: Why is it unusual?

JIM: *I've never seen it done before.*

BERKE: I guess that would make it unusual, but it shouldn't make it surprising. When you're developing a repertory for either a novel or a play or a comic strip — which, by the way, isn't done too much any more, a repertory of characters, a wide variety of characters — you look for something interesting, maybe something that hasn't been done before. I've known people in wheelchairs and there's certainly no reason that they shouldn't, in context, be in a strip as well. Cutter John is just working as an independent character, and he happens to be in a wheelchair, and occasionally that wheelchair works into the context of whatever plot is happening at the moment. But the character doesn't revolve around his chair.

The tendency is, if you have any sort of minority character (a fellow in a wheelchair is a minority because of his situation) the temptation is to use his particular classification as a source of humor. Hopefully responsible humor, but it starts looking a little patronizing. In the media, when you see a black person, usually they're playing a "black" role, like Lt. Flap in BEETLE BAILEY. There are certainly no roles for disabled people unless they're in a movie about how valiant they are, rowing across the ocean by themselves in their wheelchair-boat, or something. So it behooves me to explore other characters and other situations that maybe haven't been done before, but not exploit them at the same time. Cutter John just happens to be in a wheelchair.

JIM: *You were talking earlier about trying not to push your views too much. Did you ever take a stand, in your student days, in your strip?*

BERKE: As I indicated before, I avoid being too blatantly one-sided; for one thing, it's artistically tacky. People can't figure out today whether I'm a liberal or a conservative, and they shouldn't even be trying. But I did ignore my own advice in my student days, although I didn't know it. I did a very hurriedly-done, insensitive cartoon regarding the Mexican-American

"Strips are being developed to sell products."

SIR! I UNDERSTAND YER IN CHARGE OF THE FUNNY PAGES AT THIS NEWSPAPER!
WELL I GUESS I AM.
The Bloom Beacon
GREETINGS! I REPRESENT THE UNIVERSALLY UNITED WRITERS BUNCH SYNDICATE.
AL McMEED IS THE NAME AND COMIC STRIPS ARE THE GAME!
FEATURES DEPT
YEP! I GOT WHAT YOU WANT! STRIPS ABOUT DIVORCE! STRIPS ABOUT BABIES! STRIPS ABOUT PLUMBERS! STRIPS ABOUT DIVORCED BABY PLUMBERS!
FEATURES DEPT
HOW 'BOUT ANIMALS? YA LIKE ANIMALS IN COMIC STRIPS?
NO.
FEATURES DEPT.

population in town. They had been protesting over a very local issue on a lake near their community which they thought was too noisy, and almost getting into small-scale riots. I did a cartoon which was an unfortunate depiction of one of the protesters, and they read it as a stereotype. And that got me in more hot water than I'd like to think I'll ever be in again. I had no business doing the cartoon, and I almost got shot because of it.

JIM: *Are you serious?*

BERKE: Yeah. No one took a shot at me, but if you anger an already very sensitive group of people embroiled in a local controversy, by doing something so outrageous that it brings individuals to tears and almost to blows, you realize the depth of their feelings. You can be certain that my windows weren't open and unshuttered for a week or two after that, because there were radicals in the group, and they had done other things. It's not worrying about my safety that keeps me responsible, but you have to appreciate the sensitivities out there.

JIM: *So, THE WASHINGTON POST Writers' Group saw one of your books and came looking for you?*

BERKE: That's right. They're the syndicate that carries me now.

JIM: *Did you submit any of your stuff to the other syndicates?*

BERKE: Oh, sure. I did the rounds. I sent stuff to the four largest syndicates. Got back a couple of promising letters of "keep working, let's see what else you have." Foolishly, I was expecting a contract back in the mail, because that's how I had heard it happened. So I gave up on it, and I worked on a magazine and some other things, and later I got a call from THE WASHINGTON POST. About eight months later, BLOOM COUNTY hit the papers.

JIM: *A while ago in the strip there was a caricature of a salesman from one of the comic-strip syndicates. I was wondering if there was any basis for the caricature from what you had seen at the syndicates. What were they selling, "cow strips with cow jokes?"*

BERKE: Well, actually, if you read those particular strips carefully, I have about 16 separate commentaries on that whole idea of comic strips and how they're sold and marketed, and they're all true. The characterizations and the names I used are kind of private jokes with people, but as far as what the guy came running in saying — "You gotta have a market for your strips these days" — that's how they're bought.

JIM: *Did somebody tell you that, when you were trying to break in?*

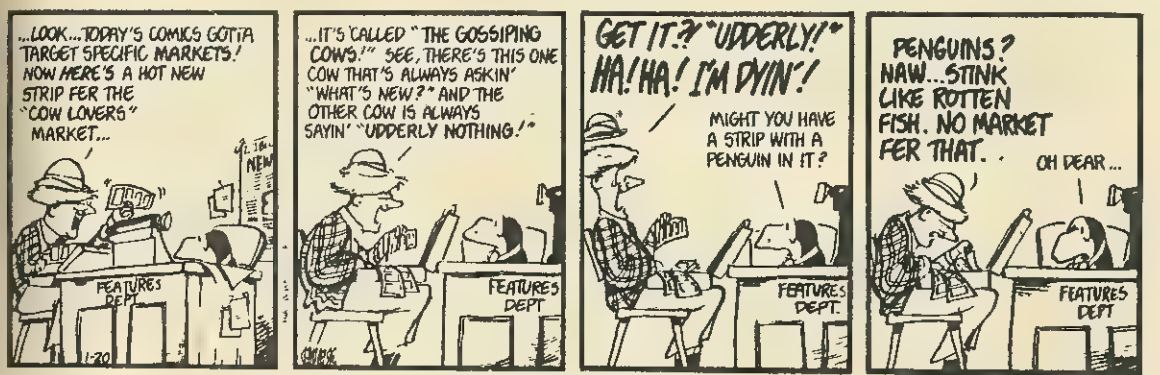
BERKE: No, but look at the comic pages. It's quite obvious. You don't have any more strips like POGO or LI'L ABNER or anything with an ensemble of characters. You have a strip about a single neurotic young women named CATHY that has nothing but women problems, and no one reads that strip except for women just like her. You have a strip about divorce only, you have a strip about grandparents, you have a strip about all these different things. Well, they're narrowing their audiences. It's easier for the newspapers to get a grab on what the strip's about by reading one or two strips. More importantly, it is easy to sell, since you can target your audience.

JIM: *What do you think of that from a creative standpoint?*

BERKE: I don't have any opinion. If it works for these people, that's fine. I'm no fan of comic strips, so I really have no opinion about these things. I don't read the comic page.

JIM: *Backing up a little, I'd like to know more about your college comic strip.*

BERKE: Well, when I was at the University of Texas I handed in an editorial cartoon to the student newspaper, and the editor encouraged me to do more. And I realized a strip would be a better way to develop a following. It went from there, running from 1978 to 1980. I published a


...LOOK...TODAY'S COMICS GOTTA TARGET SPECIFIC MARKETS! NOW HERE'S A HOT NEW STRIP FER THE "COW LOVERS" MARKET...
FEATURES DEPT
...IT'S CALLED "THE GOSSIPING COWS!" SEE, THERE'S THIS ONE COW THAT'S ALWAYS ASKIN' "WHAT'S NEW?" AND THE OTHER COW IS ALWAYS SAYIN' "UDDERLY NOTHING!"
FEATURES DEPT
GET IT?! "UDDERLY!" HA! HA! I'M DYIN'!
MIGHT YOU HAVE A STRIP WITH A PENGUIN IN IT?
FEATURES DEPT.
PENGUINS? NAW...STINK LIKE ROTTEN FISH. NO MARKET FER THAT.
OH DEAR...
FEATURES DEPT

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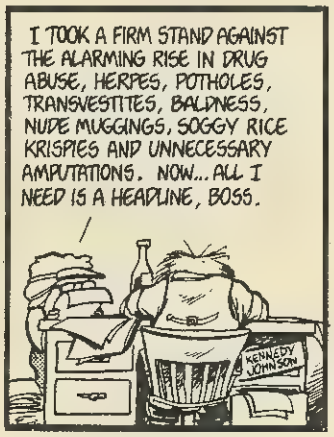
"My whole aim is NOT to stick my


I TOOK A FIRM STAND AGAINST THE ALARMING RISE IN DRUG ABUSE, HERPES, POTHOLES, TRANSVESTITES, BALDNESS, NUDE MUGGINGS, SOGGY RICE KRISPIES AND UNNECESSARY AMPUTATIONS. NOW... ALL I NEED IS A HEADLINE, BOSS.
KENNEDY
JOHNSON
© 1983 Washington Post Co.

couple of books myself, collections of strips, and that got me the attention of THE WASHINGTON POST.

JIM: *Had you been cartooning for a long time before that?*

BERKE: Oh, no. That first cartoon that I gave them was the first I'd ever done. I had always been fooling around with art, but not seriously, and never cartooning. The only art that I really had work for me was when I was running for office in high school. I definitely had the best-looking posters, and that's what get people elected to high school government office. That was the only benefit I can remember with my artwork coming into play.

JIM: *I take it you didn't major in art when you were in school.*

BERKE: No, I majored in photojournalism. By training, I'm a photographer. That's not to say it's my passion.

JIM: *Why did you end up in photojournalism?*

BERKE: Well, it's certainly better than business and economics. I enjoyed photography and I enjoyed art. I couldn't see going to art school — wrong place to find a career. I would have been happy as a photographer if I could have landed a job with NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, possibly, but certainly not working on a newspaper. So that didn't pan out. What I should have done, of course, was take a lot more history courses and political science courses in college. I would have been much happier and better educated.

JIM: *There's a quote here from an article about you, where you say "College is a good time to work out the kinks." What sort of "kinks" did you have in your college strip, ACADEMIA WALTZ?*

BERKE: Stylistic, artistic — everything. I certainly didn't work them out, but I got a jump on everybody else. Most of the syndicates get material from people who are clerks by day and come home at night and do some cartooning and send them some examples. Well, that doesn't give them a great deal of opportunity for feedback and the practical experience of the day-to day grind of drawing. School is where you get that experience. You do it every day, and hone your skills, and by the time you get out of school you're ready to do it professionally, probably. You've learned a lot, you've cleaned up your artwork, you've learned how to write in three or four boxes, which is an unusual thing to do. I can't stress it too highly.

JIM: *Did your schoolwork suffer?*

BERKE: Oh, I'm sure it suffered, but I have the sneaking suspicion it wouldn't have been a whole lot better, anyway. At the same time I was drawing cartoons I was a photographer, I was a writer, I was a reviewer. I just loved working at newspapers. I probably would have had a high B average if nothing else had happened, so instead I had a low B average.

JIM: *Tell me a little bit about ACADEMIA WALTZ — who were some of the characters?*

BERKE: Steve Dallas is lifted right out of ACADEMIA WALTZ. He was a frat boy in those days. Cutter John was "Saigon John," a Vietnam veteran. He still is a vet, but I just keep it quiet. I didn't have a penguin in those days. I had a dog who was very popular, who had a personality very close to Garfield, who didn't exist then. When I came to professional strips I was going to put the dog in. In fact, he appeared briefly. And GARFIELD came along and made a huge splash, and I realized that my dog's personality was far too close to Garfield's. So I had to completely write him out of the strip.

JIM: *Is that when the penguin came in?*

BERKE: Opus came in much later than that. I used to just have fun with an animal jumping around with the characters' situation, and it was about time I was ready for another one, but it was quite clear there were enough cats and dogs on the page already. Something more unusual was needed.

JIM: *Did you publish the collection, ACADEMIA WALTZ, on your own?*

BERKE: No, I found a publisher. I gave him some artwork for another book he was doing in exchange for him publishing mine. He thought he was on the losing end of it. He didn't think the book would sell at all. As it turned out, his book didn't sell one copy, and mine sold over ten thousand. And that's with a university population of about 30,000. It was followed by THE ACADEMIA WALTZ BOWING OUT, another compilation of strips. They looked like GARFIELD books.

JIM: *Speaking of books, I assume that's the kind of BLOOM COUNTY book that's going to be coming out . . .*

BERKE: Right, but it'll be larger, more expensive and a little more substantial. It should be fairly reflective of the second year of the strip. The first year, I just threw out.

JIM: *What about Bill the Cat? Is he meant to be a parody of Garfield? Everybody that I know reads it as a parody of Garfield.*

BERKE: That's the nice thing about these strips. You can read them any way you want. It's not for me to decide for people what it means, see? **Jim Davis** has written me saying that Garfield would like to meet Bill the Cat in a dark alley some day.

JIM: *Did he really write that letter?*

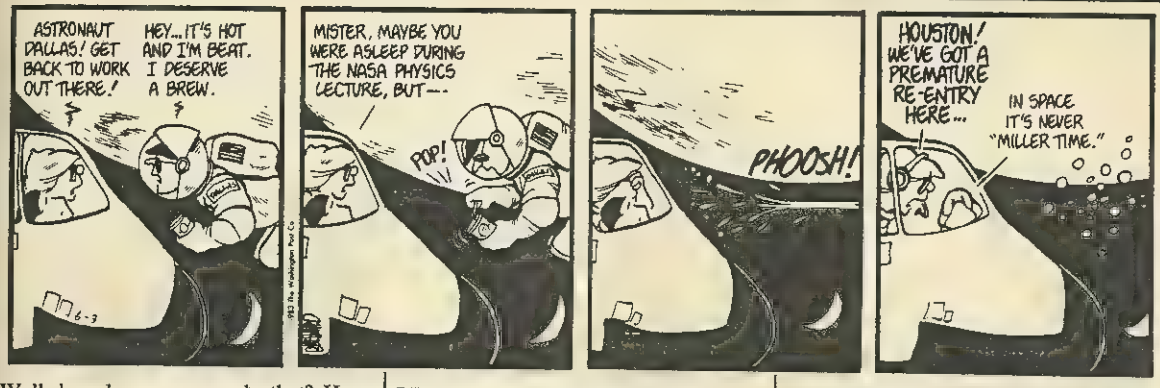
BERKE: There is that impression, but the way I see it . . . no, I won't actually say how I see it. There are obviously several levels. It's not just cats I'm parodying there. You'll begin to see that there are other things that Bill can stand for, as well.

JIM: *Do you base these characters on any particular person? And is there any character in the strip that you most identify with?*

BERKE: No, I have no *alter ego* in the strip. Obviously, you'll find parts of me in all the different characters, which is how it should be. You'll find my prejudices in one character, my sensitivity, if it exists, in another character, the mentally-disturbed side of my character in another one. Like any good novelist, I guess you put a little bit of yourself in each character.

That's what I was talking about, before. You don't see strips with good characters any more. For example, there's this new strip about a frog, called CONRAD. Every day it's a joke about him eating flies, or some pun about being a frog.

personal narrow point of view into the strip."


ASTRONAUT DALLAS! GET BACK TO WORK OUT THERE!
HEY... IT'S HOT AND I'M BEAT. I DESERVE A BREW.
MISTER, MAYBE YOU WERE ASLEEP DURING THE NASA PHYSICS LECTURE, BUT—
POP!
PHOOSH!
HOUSTON! WE'VE GOT A PREMATURE RE-ENTRY HERE...
IN SPACE IT'S NEVER "MILLER TIME."

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Well, how long can you do that? How long can people be interested in that? GARFIELD's been able to get past the stigma of having only one character, so I'm just amazed. It must be a lot easier to write, only working with one character and one basic gag context. But I don't know how you could sit down at the table each day and wanna do more jokes about flies.

JIM: *What are some of your favorite strips. I assume DOONESBURY...*

BERKE: You're quick to put DOONESBURY on my list, but I'm not a comic-strip fan. I have no particular feelings toward these strips — other than maybe PEANUTS. As I got into cartooning I looked into the history of PEANUTS, and discovered that **Charles Schulz** is a modern-day genius. He's not a particularly good writer or a particularly good artist, and he knows it. But he's the kind of man, unlike me, that was *born* to be a cartoonist. He knew it when he was four years old. That's all he ever wanted to be. And, indeed, that's the best thing he could ever be. His stuff 10 years ago, I think, was absolutely brilliant. It'll be a long time before we see that kind of material again. I think I would have read him religiously in those days. Sure, I enjoy DOONESBURY, but there are certainly bigger fans than me. The humor I appreciate is usually in film or on television.

JIM: *So, are you influenced by any TV shows or movies in particular?*

BERKE: Well, not directly. I find SCTV absolutely hilarious, I don't know if that could influence my style of humor. What impressed me about DOONESBURY — and here's where **Trudeau** did influence me — is that he was the first to bring to a comic strip some of the same qualities people put into a good television or film script. He's just as funny if you read transcripts of his strip without the drawings. Which is probably why our strips look so similar at times, because there's dialogue as opposed to gags.

JIM: *Do you have an assistant?*

BERKE: No. I can't imagine having an assistant, although the big-time cartoonists all do. In fact, the assistants are doing the strip for the cartoonist. I think when you get to the point where you have someone else doing your strip for you, you might as well hang it up. But so much money is involved that they don't.

JIM: *Well, you don't seem to be in cartooning for the sake of cartooning —*

BERKE: I'd much rather put the work into other creative mediums. Film, television.

JIM: *Would you eventually like to take the route of...*

BERKE: Yeah, **Trudeau** again. Writing screenplays. Let me just say what **Charles Schulz** said: cartooning is a halfway business. You have to be a halfway-good writer, and you have to be a halfway-good artist — and that's an understatement — to be a successful cartoonist. That's not always the case, but he offers himself as an example of that truism. Well, I take pride in my writing — not necessarily in my artwork — and I would hope that I could combine that ability with my love of photography and film. But right now my comic strip seems to be the natural thing that I fell into. Someone offered me a contract, which doesn't happen very often, and I probably wouldn't have had the gumption to chase after one, so I just fell into this. But I'd love to write a novel about BLOOM COUNTY, and novelize the characters.

JIM: *Anything else you'd like to add about comic strips — your own or others?*

BERKE: I tend to talk too much about other cartoonists. I don't want to ever leave an impression of disdain for the rest of the cartoon page. Sometimes it seems that way because I'm not very familar with it and, unlike most cartoonists, who are real big fans of the very stuff that they practice, I'm not. I don't even know that I'd like *my* material. Maybe if the comics pages went through an aggressive period of change, I'd take more of an interest. But because of the conservative nature of the business, run by the syndicates who own everybody, they like to keep things at a pace of progression that is almost a standstill. They go with tried-and-true formulas each time. And now with the merchandising aspect of the business coming into being, with GARFIELD being so successful, strips are being developed just to sell products featuring the characters in the strip — which is an ass-backwards way of doing a comic strip. That considered, I can't really see a good future for the comics page.

OKAY... NOW LISTEN TO THIS BILLY JOEL RECORD PLAYED BACKWARDS... YOU CAN HEAR THE DEVIL LYRICS... THEY'RE VERY DISGUISED... I MEAN, THEY APPEAR TO BE A SORT OF INCANTATION... LISTEN!

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"I was totally nude, and they air-

BOB SHAREN

Bob Sharen, in accordance with his profession, is a colorful fellow. Quick of wit, and outspoken of opinion. As we talked over lunch (oysters on the half shell, crab sandwich, and grilled Reuben with Heineken Dark), Bob discussed his feelings on a wide range of subjects . . .

BRIAN TALLEY: *Did you read comics growing up?*

BOB SHAREN: I got involved with comics when Marvel came along. I had all the original HULKs, the FF when they first came out. All those TALES TO ASTONISH, with characters like Fin Fang Foom. I used to love those guys.

BRIAN: *What got you interested in working in comics?*

BOB: Well, I used to teach art privately, but I never really intended to work in comics. When I came back here from California, I started to ink backgrounds for **Dave Hunt**, and he would do an occasional color job, and that was a lot more fun than doing backgrounds. So about six years ago, **George Roussos** was the head of the coloring department and he actually gave me my first job.

BRIAN: *What was your first full assignment?*

BOB: First book I colored was GODZILLA #13. Which **Don Warfield** accidentally got credit for.

BRIAN: *Do you enjoy being a colorist?*

BOB: I love it! My only regret is that the more that I work for Marvel, the less of my own artwork I get to do. Right now I'm trying to find time to learn glassblowing.

BRIAN: *As colorist, you of course contribute the color. But what else do you try to add to the look of the book?*

BOB: Well, right now I'm trying to get together with inkers, and try to do more of the kind of thing that **Klaus Janson** had been doing in DAREDEVIL. With overlays, and zip-a tones in overlay for backgrounds — because the inker is the one responsible for overlays, if we do them. It really adds a lot of texture and interest to a book to do that, rather than to do straight color on black and white art. You can get a lot of interesting effects doing overlays that you can't get any other way. And I would like to see more of that done, because I think it expands the range of things you can do with color.

BRIAN: *How much more effort is involved in the process?*

BOB: It's more work for the inker, because the inker is usually the guy who gets stuck doing the actual overlays. I've talked to a couple editors about getting access to the original art and doing the overlays myself, where I think the book would benefit from it. That way it takes a load off the inker. It's a little bit of extra work for me, but I wouldn't mind, because it would make the book look better.

BRIAN: *Any books you've done that you wish you could have back to do again?*

BOB: No. Because the editors are usually pretty good at catching things that they consider to be dubious. I've had a few toe-to-toe battles with editors over things that I considered to be good coloring, but for some reason they didn't. They always get to win, unless I can convince them that my thinking has some merit.

BRIAN: *Does this happen often?*

BOB: Not really.

BRIAN: *I know that Marvel strives for realism, but occasionally I'll see a pink sky or building in the background. Why pink? Why not blue skies or gray building?*

BOB: I try to steer away from pink. Sometimes I'll do a yellow sky or something like that, because if you've got a guy who's white or blue up against a blue sky, there's not much contrast. Generally, the only reason I do a pink sky is for a sunrise

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bob Sharen

Occupation: Colorist.

Born: 27 September 1946 in Morristown, NJ. Shooter and I have the same birthday. Different year — same day.

Training: I went to several art schools — jumped around. I never did get around to teaching art. Because when I did my practice teaching, I was horrified.

Equipment: Everybody uses Dr. Martin's watercolors, and whatever brush they feel comfortable with. I use a number six or seven Windsor-Newton series brush, which are expensive, but they are the best tools for the job.

Spectrum: We have sixty-four possible colors we can get out of combinations of percentages of red, yellow, and blue. There are several colors that are sort of on the weird end of the color chart that we don't usually use because they get too muddy or they're just not appropriate.

brushed the clothing on me. (Laughter.)"

or sunset or to contrast the character in the panel. Some people just go nuts. (Laughter.) The name of the game is contrast and clarity. If you've got a character that's going to have no contrast against a regular sky, then you have to come up with a different color.

BRIAN: *Which characters are the hardest and easiest to do?*

BOB: The easiest are Daredevil and Moon Knight. Moon Knight is all white, and you get to do weird effects with him, strange lighting. You can make him darker or put funny highlights on him. He's a good character to work with. Daredevil is just all red. As far as hardest — the Hulk can sometimes be hard because he's green, and if you're trying to color him in a forest, green on green just doesn't make it.

BRIAN: *Can't use pink leaves, either.*

BOB: Sometimes you can, if he's on some weird alien planet — but if he's on the earth and he's against any kind of foliage, you have to be careful that you get maximum contrast out of it. Otherwise, he just disappears.

BRIAN: *Let's go into detail about the photo cover for SPIDER-WOMAN #50. How it was set up, and how you were involved . . .*

BOB: First, let me say for the record that I was totally nude, and they airbrushed clothing on me (Laughter). **Mark Gruenwald** was in charge of the whole thing, and they were looking for people to dress in funny costumes and hang from a fire escape. I had just finished up a job in the office and I said "Sure, why not." Fortunately it wasn't too cold. It was in January, I think, and we all went up to **Bob Camp's** studio on 37th Street. Put on funny costumes, went out in the semi-cold weather, and posed for 30-second exposures out on the fire escape. **Bob Camp** almost took a header off the fire escape. He had to wear white socks over his shoes to simulate the Enforcer's boots, and he slipped. His plastic gun took a beating when it dropped.

BRIAN: *Who were you?*

BOB: I was the Werewolf. There was **Mike Carlin, Mark Gruenwald, John Morelli,** Mark's wife was the Gypsy Moth. **Ann Nocenti** was Tigra — she was totallyairbrushed because she didn't have a costume.

BRIAN: *No costume?*

BOB: Yes, Ann and I were both nude, but don't tell my wife. (Laughter.)

BRIAN: *Who was Spider-Woman?*

BOB: Spider-Woman was **Lynn Luckmnn,** one of the secretaries at Marvel. She was picked because they thought she might look good in a Spider-Woman suit, and she did.

BRIAN: *Before we started taping, you were talking about what a crazy place the Bullpen is, and telling me about Jack Abel. How would you describe Jack?*

BOB: (Long pause.) **Jack Abel** is probably one of the sanest people up there. He has a great sense of humor. He's an old pro — not old in the physical sense. But in that he's been in the business for quite a while. He's a great guy and he always has something funny to say. You can always strike up a fun argument with Jack on just about anything. It's great entertainment when **Bob Wiacek** and Jack are going at it. **Morrie Kuramoto** also sticks his 25 cents worth in. And everytime Morrie opens his mouth, there are cries in the background of "Shut mouth, ancient one!" (Laughter.)

BRIAN: *You ever get in the middle of any of this mess?*

BOB: It's hard not to get drawn into it

"I've had a few battles with editors."

when you're sitting around with those guys.

BRIAN: *What book do you enjoy coloring the most?*

BOB: I like DOC STRANGE. I've always leaned towards the mystical type story. There are a lot of good visions in DOCTOR STRANGE that give me the opportunity to do strange lighting effects or things that I normally don't get to do on other books.

BRIAN: *Pretty much get to let yourself go?*

BOB: Well, I think they like it when I do, because it's supposed to be a weird book. And when I get good and weird they say "Yes, do more of that."

BRIAN: *What other books are you doing on a regular or semi regular basis?*

BOB: Let me go down the list. INDIANA JONES, HULK, DOCTOR STRANGE, THE THING, which used to be TWO-IN-ONE, IRON MAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA, one or both of the SPIDER-MAN books. (depending on scheduling), TEAM-UP, MICRONAUTS, and a couple of others.

BRIAN: *You work quite a bit on SPIDER-MAN. What are your impressions of Tom DeFalco?*

BOB: Tom is really the hit man for Marvel Comics. It should be obvious from his name alone that he has several good Mafia connections. Seriously speaking, Tom is a good guy. He's no trouble to work for. Even though he sometimes makes ridiculous color suggestions which I go along with to humor him because he is one of my favorite editors.

BRIAN: *What is one of the main problems you face as a colorist?*

BOB: The biggest problem in being a colorist is the time factor. The writer, penciller, inker, letterer, and colorist all have to be on time, and if any or all of them are late, then it really becomes critical with me because I'm the last guy in the process. I try to give myself a minimum of time to do a good book. I hate to rush. And I like to do the best job that I can. Sometimes, the only way to do that is to stay up all night. If I could make one thing better, it would be to give myself a bit of a time cushion, and try to make everyone else be more on time. I'm not saying everybody's late. But where one or more people are late on a book, then it really gets insane for the colorist.

BRIAN: *Any specific order in which colorists do a job?*

BOB: I think everybody does it a little differently. I haven't actually looked over too many people's shoulders while they're working. But the way I do it is: First, I go through and color all the characters, and then do the backgrounds for contrast.

BRIAN: *Ever have the notion to try writing?*

BOB: Since I go over the books page after page, time after time, when I work on them, I sort of criticize the writing as I go along. Sometimes I find a lot to criticize. And I think that everybody that works in comics has had an idea that they wanted to develop into a story. I've never actually sat down and tried to write a comic, so I guess I really shouldn't criticize someone else's writing until I try to do it myself and see what it's all about.

BRIAN: *We're here talking at a small convention — Comic Book Jubilee — in Norfolk, Virginia. A colorist at a convention is kind of rare, isn't it?*

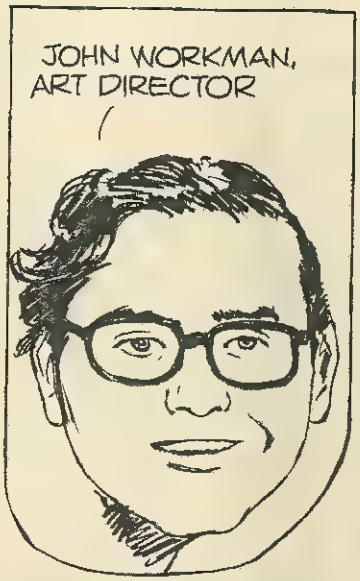
BOB: Well, one thing I'm kinda glad about is that as a colorist, I'm not in the fan spotlight. People don't write letters to criticize my work. And it's nice to be more-or-less anonymous.

The cover of SPIDER-WOMAN #50, starring Bob Sharen.

© 1983 MCG

"HEAVY METAL's material is divergent."

Art: John Workman



JOHN WORKMAN

HEAVY METAL art director John Workman is a writer/artist in his own right, and as such is acutely sensitive to the quality of the material which appears in HM. It is due, in large measure, to Workman's efforts that recent issues have seen a real upswing in the quality of the material, and also more appearances by American artists such as M. W. Kaluta, Berni Wrightson, Jeffrey Jones, Gray Morrow, Nick Cuti and Kent Williams.

The interview takes place in John's office, the walls of which are festooned with posters, drawings, photos and doodles of a properly fantastic nature. It was easy to see from the collection of fantasia and inter-galactic exotica on the walls that working for HEAVY METAL is not simply a job to John Workman — he is working with the very substance of his own fantasies . . .

— Steve Ringgenberg

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: John Workman
Occupation: Art Director for HEAVY METAL magazine; artist and writer
Residence: Staten Island
Born: Beckley, West Virginia — 20 June 1950
Training: Pretty much self-taught.
All Time Favorite Comics: WEIRD SCIENCE FANTASY #27, BATMAN #11, COMICS CAVALCADE #14, and LITTLE LULU IN ALASKA.
Favorite President: FDR
Pet Peeve About Comics: The fact that there are too many people involved in the creation of a single item.

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *John, you are the Art Director of HEAVY METAL magazine and I am sure that many people want to know — what exactly does an Art Director do?*

JOHN WORKMAN: I wonder about that myself, sometimes. In my case, because we have so much material coming out of other countries and going into HEAVY METAL, what we have to do is look at the individual stories and determine how we are going to prepare them for the printer. I do a lot of lettering myself, so that is no big problem. But each story has to be approached in a different way. We have to solve all sorts of problems in dealing with the production.

STEVE: *Would you like to be using more American stuff?*

JOHN: It bothers me that we don't have an opportunity to use some of the American guys but we have at least, I would say, three years of foreign material in the office right now. The only way we can get

"Miller's RONIN shows an American can

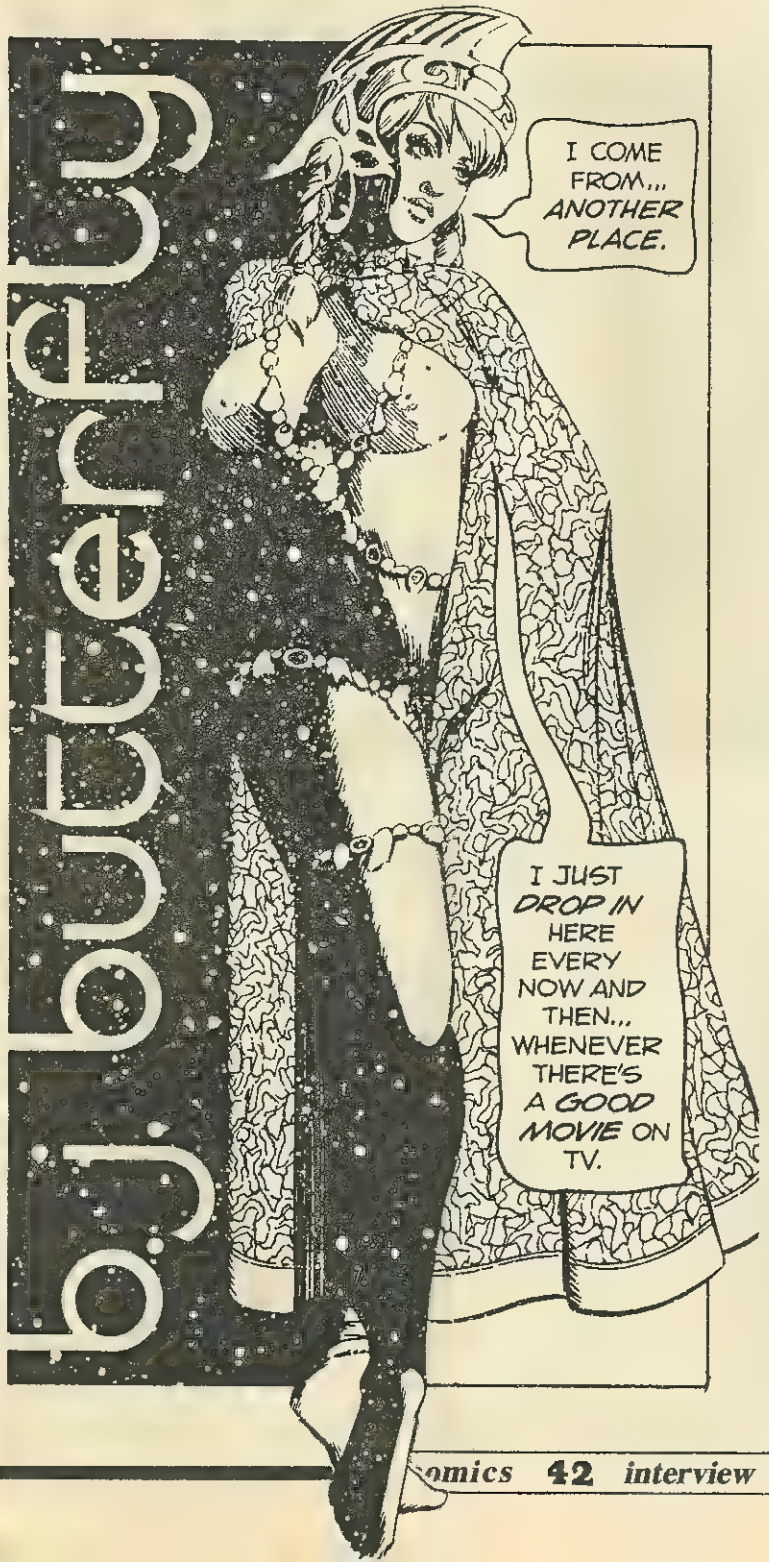
American guys in is on very short things — for instance, the JUNE 2050 feature that started in November of '82.

STEVE: *Was that your idea?*

JOHN: Yeah. It was a way, I thought, to get guys in HEAVY METAL, guys who have been around for thirty years, and guys who are just starting out. I think, ultimately, it will make a great book. It's all held together by the title JUNE 2050, but there is enough freedom there for them to just go wild. I am a little bit disappointed in the reaction to it by the artists, because for years I have heard them moan, "Oh, if I only had the time, if I only had the freedom to do whatever I wanted, I'd turn out the greatest thing in the world." I've talked to several artists about it, and a reaction that I didn't expect at all was, "My gosh, I can do anything I want . . . but I need a writer!" The original intent was that the artist would do everything. And yet a lot of people, I think, have become so conditioned to being "just the artist" that they feel that they can't write or that they can't letter things. They can only draw

STEVE: *On the other hand, when artists are encouraged to be their own writers, a lot of the stuff they write is just plain awful!*

JOHN: That's true. But I took that into account, and figured how could I go wrong? Even if the stuff isn't great, it's only *one page.* It can't hurt the overall effect of the magazine! And even when something is turned in by an artist that isn't quite what we want, at least the art may be interesting. But it really amazes me that so many different artists don't think of themselves as total creators, of being capable of creating a page of comics. Because, to me, real comics, good comics, can't be broken up into all these diverse elements. At the very least, if you have someone doing the lettering, and someone doing the penciling and someone doing the inking and someone doing the writing, you have to have one strong person in there controlling everything. I got home yesterday and the UPS fellow had just dropped off the newly-reprinted EC set of FRONTLINE COMBAT. And of course, it's all **Kurtzman.** Now, **Kurtzman** didn't draw all of the stories, but he told all of them, because he knew what he wanted. He'd write the stories and he'd have **Ben Oda** or whoever doing the lettering under his very strict supervision and then he would do stick figures on overlays, so he knew what he was going to get out of it. He knew how he wanted the story told, the pacing, and . . . sure, maybe **Jack Davis** or someone else drew it, but it was still **Kurtzman** who ran the whole thing. And I don't know how people can consider comics as just little bits and pieces of things. The words and the pictures are



B.J. Butterfly was conceived as a possible page for LAMPOON in 1977, appeared in GASM later that year, and in HEAVY METAL in 1983.

© 1978 John Workman

shoot the Europeans out of the water."

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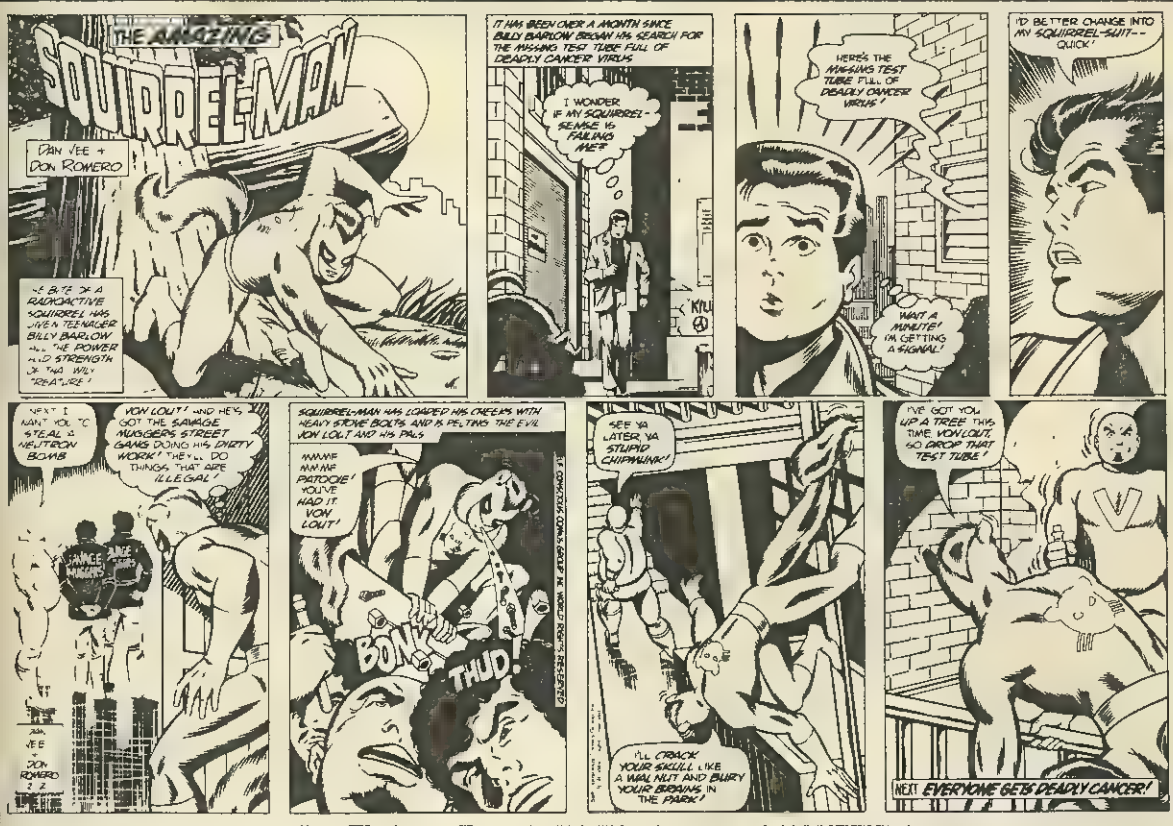

THE AMAZING SQUIRREL-MAN
DAN VEE + DON ROMERO
IT HAS BEEN OVER A MONTH SINCE BILLY BARLOW BEGAN HIS SEARCH FOR THE MISSING TEST TUBE FULL OF DEADLY CANCER VIRUS
I WONDER IF MY SQUIRREL-SENSE IS FAILING ME?
HERE'S THE MISSING TEST TUBE FULL OF DEADLY CANCER VIRUS!
WAIT A MINUTE! I'M GETTING A SIGNAL!
I'D BETTER CHANGE INTO MY SQUIRREL-SUIT-- QUICK!
NEXT I WANT YOU TO STEAL A NEUTRON BOMB
VON LOUT! AND HE'S GOT THE SAVAGE MUGGERS STREET GANG DOING HIS DIRTY WORK! THEY'LL DO THINGS THAT ARE ILLEGAL!
SQUIRREL-MAN HAS LOADED HIS CHEEKS WITH HEAVY STONE BOLTS AND IS PELTING THE EVIL VON LOUT AND HIS PALS
MMMM MMM PATOOIE! YOU'VE HAD IT VON LOUT!
BONK
THUD!
SEE YA LATER, YA STUPID CHIPMUNK!
I'LL CRACK YOUR SKULL LIKE A WALNUT AND BURY YOUR REMAINS IN THE PARK!
I'VE GOT YOU, UP A TREE THIS TIME, VON LOUT, SO DROP THAT TEST TUBE!
NEXT: EVERYONE GETS DEADLY CANCER!

"Squirrel-Man," by Workman. From the NATIONAL LAMPOON NEWSPAPER PARODY.

inseparable. Even though they may be done by different people, there has *got* to be *one person* behind the whole thing really telling the story.

STEVE: *Do you feel that a lot of American comics really miss the boat on that?*

JOHN: Yeah. I wish there were more guys like **Frank Miller** and **Will Eisner** and **Kurtzman.** Well, now, I'll tell you what . . . I have my handful of people that I think have, at one time or another, done genius-level work in comics. They are: **Kurtzman, Eisner, Jack Cole, Alex Toth, Bernie Krigstein, Carl Barks, Moebius, Jim Steranko,** and **Richard Corben.** There are a few others that you could toss in there and we're not even talking about comic-strip people like **Milton Caniff** or **Noel Sickles** or fellas like **Lynd Ward.** They're great. But all those guys did as much as they possibly could — not just the drawing, or the inking or the writing. **Toth** has done wonderful stories where he has done everything. There is one that **Toth** did for HOT WHEELS in, I think the fourth or fifth issue. It was maybe twelve pages long and he wrote the story and did *everything* on it. It shows what one person can do. There is a real strength about a story being told by one person — a strength that is dissipated when there are other people involved in it. It is incredible. It becomes almost like television or a movie. You can say RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK was a **Steven Spielberg** movie, but it really wasn't. I mean, maybe he was the guiding force behind it, he and **Lucas,** but there are so many other elements that are brought in there, the cinematographer, the actors, of course — all these things that have to be done by other people. Comics are probably, well, they and painting are the only visual media where *one person* can do *everything,* and I think that is the way it ought to be.

STEVE: *Are the strips you do an outgrowth of being an art director — or is it the other way around?*

JOHN: I've wanted to be a cartoonist since the time I was about twelve years old, I was always interested in writing and in art — and I couldn't believe how much freedom you got and how interesting it was when you combined the two. When I came back here in 1975 from Washington State, I intended to get into comics in one way or another. At that time I thought my talent was in inking . . .

STEVE: *Who did you ink?*

JOHN: Kurt Schaffenberger, Bob Kane, of all people . . . **Romeo Tanghal . . .**

STEVE: *That is funny, because he is now inking George Perez.*

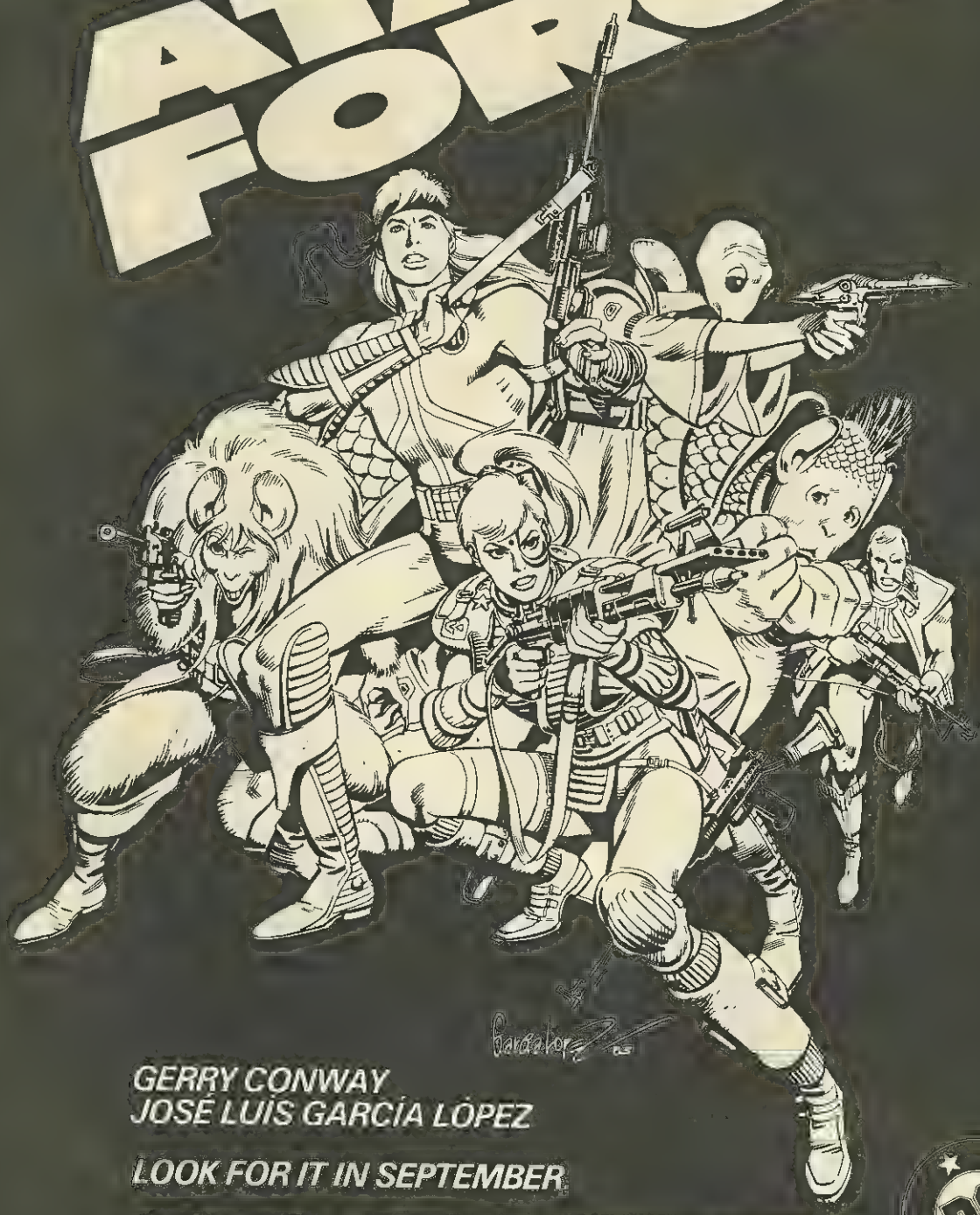
JOHN: Some of it was moderately *fun,* some of it wasn't. I had a piecemeal feeling about working that way, so I wanted to do stuff on my own. I became Art Director over here, and suddenly I didn't have the time to do a lot of this artwork that I would like to do. And I am pretty slow, maybe because I like to do *everything.* But it got to the point where I really wanted to do some artwork and didn't have the time to do it. So I started doing very small things . . . half-pages, things like that.

STEVE: *You did some longer stuff for STAR*REACH, didn't you? Was that satifying?*

JOHN: No. Well, I shouldn't say that — it was moderately fun. But I hadn't reached a level where I was happy with my work and I remember the first story I did for **Mike Friedrich** was agonizing. I was happy with the script. I had written it myself, I was doing the lettering and everything. I had been doing advertising, and doing comic stories for a couple of men's magazines, but this was, to me, the *big time* and I wanted to make it look real

THE VISUAL EXCITEMENT OF STAR RAIDERS*— EVERY MONTH

ATARI FORCE



GERRY CONWAY
JOSÉ LUIS GARCÍA LÓPEZ

LOOK FOR IT IN SEPTEMBER

THE NEW D.C. THERE'S NO STOPPING US NOW.

* INDICATES TRADEMARK OF ATARI INC. COPYRIGHT © 1983 ATARI, INC.
INDICATES TRADEMARK OF DC COMICS, INC.

"I hope EPIC gives us a run for our money."

© 1978 DC Comics, Inc.

SHE UNDERSTOOD AS HER LEGS GAVE WAY AND HER SKULL MELTED AND SHE COLLAPSED INWARD UPON HERSELF AND BEGAN TO LOSE THE USE OF HER TONGUE...
MILES, HELP ME! HELP ME!

Workman inking Romeo Tanghal for DC's THE UNEXPECTED.

good. But I wasn't comfortable with it all, and so it was agony.

STEVE: *You were both writing and drawing, weren't you?*

JOHN: Yeah. Now, I did other stuff for Mike later on. There were some fairly short things and then there was an eight- or nine-page story that **Johnny Achziger** wrote, and it was kind of fun because I edited the strip and added panels and took out panels and things like that. I thought I made the story flow a little better, and I think I cut it by at least one or two pages from what it originally had been. But still the artwork, I think, was pretty bad and I really didn't have a lot of fun doing it. When I look back on it, it wasn't all *that* horrible, really, but it is nothing I am particularly proud of.

STEVE: *Well, now that you're on the other side of the desk or drawing table, how do you decide what goes into HEAVY METAL?*

JOHN: There are three of us here on staff that decide. **Len Mogel,** our publisher, **Julie Simmons-Lynch,** our editor, and myself. We all vote on the cover. And we have some great debates, I'll tell you. There are times when two of us will really like or really hate a cover, and the other one is feeling the opposite way. But all of us get our vote in on the cover and we pick it that way. The interior is initially selected by Julie the series and the individual stories. Then I lay the issue out, figuring, well, we'll put **Corben** here because his style looks like this, then we'll put something very linear next to that, and so forth. Then I trim things. I talk over with Julie the proper breaks in the continued stories, a logical place to break the story and leave some suspense and bring the readers back to the next issue. Then we go in and choose some shorter things that are going to run for that issue. There is almost always something that just doesn't work as far as having too many pages or that looked good — maybe something out of Italy or Spain or France or whatever — but has a terrible story with it. Sometimes Julie will save something by re-writing it. And, sometimes, we will just chuck it out.

STEVE: *Who does the translations?*

JOHN: **Chris Miner** does just about all of them. My brother, Bill, is my assistant. He handles mechanicals. **Lou Stathis** handles ZORA and the Dossier section and the letter column.

STEVE: *I thought the Dossier section was a good idea. I'm surprised you didn't do it earlier.*

JOHN: We had a basic idea for putting in something like that as far back as 1979. The original reason was, so many people were saying, "HEAVY METAL is great to look at, but I read through it in twenty minutes." So we decided we had to have some text in there. When **Ted White** came in as editor in 1980, we started the four columns — on music, movies, books, and comics. They were different from what everyone had in mind because they were much longer. I think everyone was thinking more-or-less of something pretty close to what we have now — where the articles are relatively short and there are a lot of them on a handful of pages. If you

Workman satirizes Norman Mailer and Jack Henry Abbot for NATIONAL LAMPOON.

GEE, MR. MAILER, I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE YOU GOT ME OUT OF JAIL!
DAMMIT, JACK, PRISON IS NO PLACE FOR A HOMICIDAL MANIAC LIKE YOU! YOU MAY BE CRAZY, BUT YOU CAN WRITE ALMOST AS GOOD AS ME!
HMMM I'M A LITTLE SHORT.
THAT'LL BE $1.50
DON'T WORRY— I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT!
OH, JACK, NOT AGAIN!
ARRGH!

© 1982 NATIONAL LAMPOON, Inc.

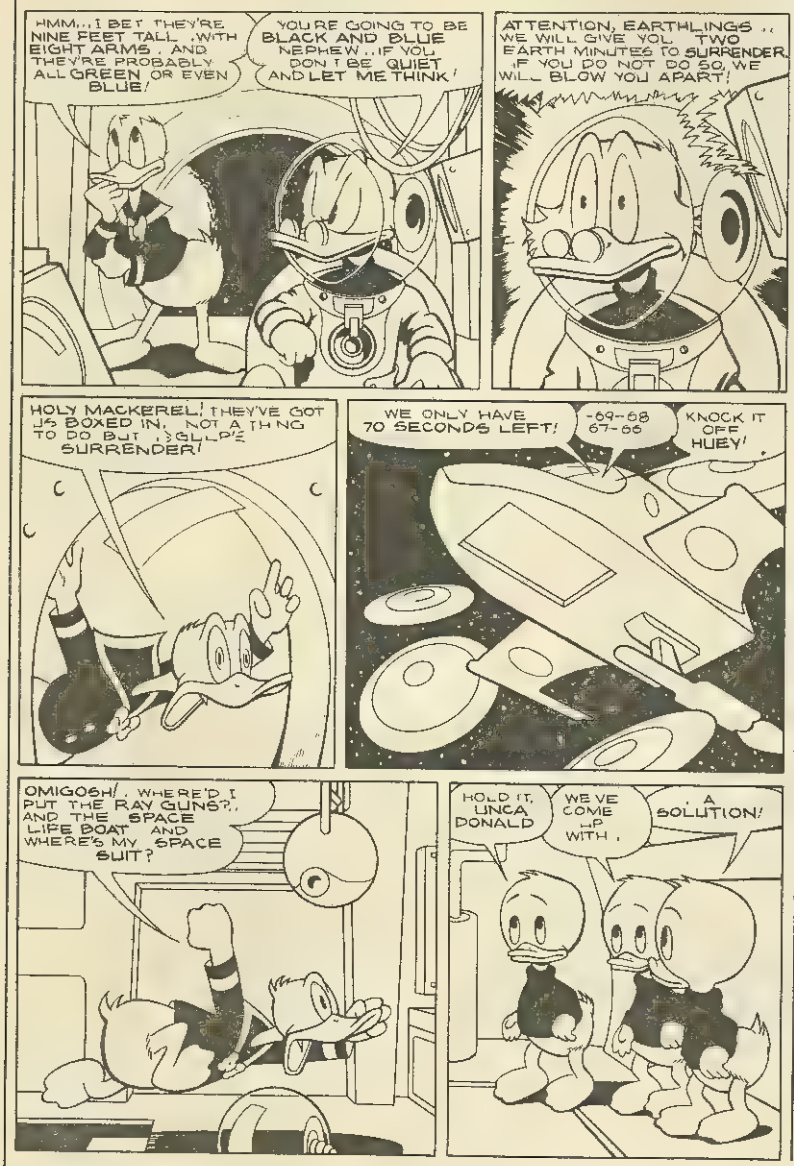
"I prefer a flawed but pure artistic

don't like one writer or one article, you can jump to something that you might enjoy. Also, this touches on kind of a sore point with us . . . the advertisers. The main problem is that when our advertising people go to a prospective advertiser, maybe the advertiser is in his 50s or something like that . . . I don't know if age is a part of it, but you show them HEAVY METAL and they say, "Oh, it is a comic book. Where are the Aurora plastic models or the B-B gun ads," or whatever they may have been used to seeing in the comic books of their youth. We felt that if we put in articles or something like the Dossier section, then they might see it more as a magazine. And it *has* worked to some degree. Especially **John Holmstrum's** Video Reviews. They've made people aware that HEAVY METAL readers are interested in video games and, because of that, some of the advertisers are starting to take ads in the book.

STEVE: *What do you look for, personally, as a comics fan?*

JOHN: I like traditional comics, and I like stuff that is very non-traditional. I think that leads us into that strength that HEAVY METAL has: Our material is so divergent. We have something that ordinary comics had at one time — in the '40s and even in the '50s — and I think have since lost. That is, so many different styles of art and different kinds of story-telling all in one issue. There are no longer fifty-two or seventy-six pages in a comic. Usually you get one story out of it, by one artist — so if you like that, that is fine, but if you don't, then you don't pick it up. HEAVY METAL has so many different things going for it that you can pick it up and really dislike ten pages and really love ten pages and kind of go up and down with the rest of it. But there is a lot there to look at. That is what I look for. I try not to be too middle-of-the-road or anything. When I am looking at people's artwork I recognize that when something is really different, that doesn't make it bad and when something is really traditional, that doesn't keep it from being possible HEAVY METAL material.

"A 1973 sample DONALD DUCK page. Barks liked it. The California offices of Gold Key liked it. The New York office turned thumbs down."


HMM... I BET THEY'RE NINE FEET TALL, WITH EIGHT ARMS, AND THEY'RE PROBABLY ALL GREEN OR EVEN BLUE!
YOU'RE GOING TO BE BLACK AND BLUE NEPHEW, IF YOU DON'T BE QUIET AND LET ME THINK!
ATTENTION, EARTHLINGS.. WE WILL GIVE YOU TWO EARTH MINUTES TO SURRENDER. IF YOU DO NOT DO SO, WE WILL BLOW YOU APART!
HOLY MACKEREL! THEY'VE GOT US BOXED IN. NOTHING TO DO BUT SURRENDER!
WE ONLY HAVE 70 SECONDS LEFT!
-69-68 67-66
KNOCK IT OFF HUEY!
OMIGOSH!, WHERE'D I PUT THE RAY GUNS?, AND THE SPACE LIFE BOAT AND WHERE'S MY SPACE SUIT?
HOLD IT, UNCA DONALD
WE'VE COME UP WITH A SOLUTION!

© 1983 Walt Disney Prod.

STEVE: *What is wrong and what is right with American comics?*

JOHN: It bothers me that in catering to the fan market and in losing newsstand outlets over the last ten or fifteen years, American comics publishers have turned their backs on their traditional audience. In some ways it is better for them and in some ways it isn't. The direct sales market is good, in that they know how many books they are going to sell, and they won't have to print twice that number of books in order to sell half of them, as they do with newsstand sales. But they aren't aiming at as wide an audience as they once were. They have a fan audience that knows these characters and knows what happened to Superman in 1957, and Spider-Man in 1965. The writers realize that, so they just go on and on in their stories and assume that the reader knows a lot of the history of these characters. The Earth 2, the Earth 3 and the Earth X stuff is an example of that. A new reader an eight year old kid, let's say used to go into a drugstore and pick up a comic and say, "Hey, gee, I like this," and he'd buy it. Now he picks up a comic and finds that it is in the fortieth part of this massive epic and he has to know what has happened before and he has to know about these characters or else he is totally lost. Increasingly, kids pick this up and they look at it and they don't know what is going on and they put it back and don't buy it. So the companies are really losing newsstand sales and since sales are slipping fewer retailers want to stock comics.

Recently, I talked to a jobber that I know in the state of Washington. He told

creation to a soulless monstrosity."

me they were having trouble getting retailers to stock comics. All the time that I spent growing up in this little town in Washington, they had *the greatest* distribution of comics. Any comic book you wanted, you could find right there in that town. And now that isn't true. A friend of mine told me that he has to go all over creation to get all the DCs or all of the Marvels and if he wants to get any of the direct sales stuff he either has to subscribe or go to Seattle. This is a guy in his thirties. Now imagine a little kid who is moderately interested in comic books and has to face the possibility of traipsing all over town or going ninety miles to Seattle to find what he might be interested in. These kids are just giving up. In large cities, maybe it is working well where the comic stores are easy to get to - but out in the hinterlands, where there are *hundreds of thousands* of possible readers, nobody is picking them up because they just can't find them.

STEVE: *What do you think can be done to make comics accessible to a larger audience?*

JOHN: I think and I am surprised this hasn't happened already — there ought to be more HEAVY METAL type magazines. We'd like to see some real competition around.

STEVE: *Do you consider EPIC competition?*

JOHN: I really hoped it would be when I first heard about it, and when it came out, it wasn't. But **Archie Goodwin,** a great guy, sent over their most recent issue, and I thought, "My gosh, they are really starting to do some good stuff." I really hope they give us a run for our money. And I hope that DC and some other people get in there and do it, because printing on good paper and offering ninety-six pages of divergent material can only be good for everybody. I just wish more people would do it. I *do* want to say that DC took a gigantic step with **Frank Miller's** RONIN. I know it isn't the 96 page magazine with a wide variety of material that I've spoken of, but it does show that an American can shoot the Europeans right out of the water.

STEVE: *As a writer-artist, do you have any ambitions to do a strip again?*

JOHN: I don't know if I could. Every now and then, I think about newspaper strips and then I take a look at what is being printed and what is being done to the poor things and I sort of shy away from that. I'd like to do some longer things for HEAVY METAL. There's a four-part strip called BOMA that I'll finish someday. I'd like to do some things for Marvel and DC, but I don't know about the method of working. It is accepted in ordinary comics that you have so many people involved in it **Jack Kirby** is a wonderful creator, comes up with great concepts and ideas and characters and all, and yet he was at his best when he was with **Stan Lee. Lee** did this great dialogue that worked off of **Kirby's** ideas and his storytelling and his art. When **Kirby** moved over to DC, again he came up with great concepts, great ideas . . . and some really atrocious dialogue to go along with it. So everybody needs a guiding hand there — an editor or somebody who can keep you from moving off a cliff, going in the wrong direction, or whatever. I remember when the Beatles' white album came out. The critical opinion was that with some editing, they would have had a truly classic single album. I guess it's true, but then we'd probably never have heard **Lennon's** weird "Revolution #9" or "Good Night" or "Why Don't We Do It In The Road?" Sometimes it's good to see the artist's warts and all. I'd prefer a flawed but pure artistic creation to a soulless monstrosity that's slapped together by a whole group of people. Maybe everybody needs some guidance . . . but . . . think about it . . . who's going to edit the editor?

A page from "Key Club," by Workman. From STAR*REACH #2

PROLOGUE: A WARM SUMMER NIGHT IN 2015..
SIT HERE BESIDE ME, AMY... AND TELL ME
...WAS I GOOD?
YOUR PERFORMANCE WAS NEAR-FLAWLESS, JEREMY... MOVEMENTS WERE GREAT... TIMING WAS RIGHT. ALL IN ALL, A PERFECT SEDUCTION! YOU'RE READY FOR THE BIG TIME NOW.
I-UH-I SUPPOSE I SHOULD THANK YOU, AMY!
THERE IS NO NEED FOR SUCH EMOTIONAL WORDS. AFTER ALL, I DON'T NEED THEM I'M NOT...
I KNOW...
...I KNOW!
YOU'RE...
...NOT..
...HUMAN!
1

© 1974 John Workman

"I love the publishers. They prefer to deal

Photo: Ron Fontes

with me because I speak their language."

MIKE FRIEDRICH

*Mike Friedrich's name should be familiar to comics fans, appearing as it has in so many capacities over the years — from writer (for Marvel and DC Comics) to publisher and packager (Star*Reach Productions) to direct sales manager for Marvel (he even acted as distribution consultant for COMICS INTERVIEW). Now Mike is carving out yet another career for himself, and during a recent trip to New York City, he sat down with Jim Salicrup and myself at an eastside greasy spoon to tell us all about it . . .*

DAK: *You wrote for DC and Marvel Comics for years, you published the Star*Reach comic line, you were direct sales manager for Marvel — what are you up to these days?*

MIKE FRIEDRICH: About a year ago, I formed an agency representing comics writers and artists with new characters and series. What that involves is working with creative people to come up with good-looking presentations to make to the various editors, and matching the creative people with the best publisher for them. I try to get the perfect fit between what the creative persons want and what a publisher has to offer.

DAK: *Conceivably, the creator could approach the publisher directly — so what service do you provide?*

MIKE: Well, there are two things. One: To anyone who is new to the field, I provide top-level connections; I deal with the top people in all of the companies. I have a quality standard associated with my name, so that when an editor sees something in a Star*Reach envelope, it is opened and read immediately. It is not put on the slush pile. I get very fast responses. And if the responses are positive, I then go straight to the top to work out the actual terms.

Two: For someone who is already in the field and who already knows who all the publishers are and who to go talk to and all that stuff, I'm offering a savings of time. There are a half-dozen serious publishers out there, each with a range of very, very different deals, all of which are complicated (eighteen-page contracts are not unusual and every paragraph is important). It is very complicated to negotiate all of that. Any working professional is going to make more money continuing to work than they are going to pay me to represent them in a deal.

DAK: *Could you be specific?*

MIKE: My favorite example of that last point is an artist who went from one major company to another for a *very* important deal. He spent nine months negotiating a contract, during which he was able to do three months worth of work. So he lost six months' worth of income. Now, that is a six-figure number, for this particular person. Well, an agent wouldn't have cost that much.

It is also possible, in some cases, that I know a little bit more than even a working professional, and that I can get a better deal from people. I can know what to ask for — because of my sales and marketing connections in the field, I have a very strong idea of what a particular creator is worth in the marketplace. So I know what the publisher knows, whereas creators may *not* know what they are worth out there. So I can perhaps negotiate better, even with somebody that the creator already has a working relationship with.

JIM SALICRUP: *Who are your clients now?*

MIKE: Well, I have negotiated contracts on behalf of **Michael Moorcock, Roy Thomas, Craig Russell** and **Michael Gilbert** for the ELRIC series from Pacific Comics; on behalf of **Mark Evanier** and **Will Meugniot** for the DNAgents with Eclipse Publishing; on behalf of **Steve Gerber** and **Val Mayerik** for the series called VOID INDIGO with Epic Comics from Marvel. I have about another dozen clients who have put together material for presentation that is either in the process of development now or in negotiation with various publishers.

DAK: *I remember a few years ago when Marshall Rogers came into Marvel Comics with an agent, and the reaction was chilly — to put it mildly. Things*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mike Friedrich
Residence: Berkeley, five miles from where I was born.
Born: March 27, 1949 – Oakland, California.
Occupation: Publishing agent for the comics industry. Part-time comics distribution consultant.
Training: Self-taught.
Background: Writer, sales manager, publisher, editor, consultant.
Comic-book credits: Most of the characters that existed at DC in the late Sixties and many of the characters at Marvel.
Favorite Comic-Book: BATMAN, 1942, and many years since. Currently, CEREBUS THE AARDVARK. I have odd tastes.
Under-Appreciated Artists: Alex Toth, Joe Kubert, Lee Marrs. People who have a very impressionistic style, not illustrative. Their work is not as well received in the market today as it is with me.

"I want a partnership between client and

seem to have changed — is that because of the whole rights situation?

MIKE: Totally. The reaction I've gotten from every single publisher is that in many ways they'd prefer to deal with me, because I speak their language. I can walk into **Paul Levitz's** or **Mike Hobson's** or **Jim Galton's** or **Jenette Kahn's** office and we're automatically on common ground. I mean, I know the world that they work in and I know their world view. They know that it takes a long time to explain the comic-book business and educate someone, such as a creative person or even a professional like an attorney or an agent that knows nothing about comics specifically — as to what this business is all about. When I come in, they don't need to go through that. They say "X,Y,Z." And I go, "A,B,C," in response, and they understand me and I understand them, and we really get down to the meat of any discussion right away. I am a professional. I have a long career history; everyone knows what it is. I have good relationships with all these people. I love all the publishers; I think all the publishers are great. It is not an antagonistic relationship — I'm not there to beat every last dime out of a publisher that I can get. I don't want that. I want a partnership between my client and the publishers that is working towards everyone's profit. I want the publishers to make a hell of a lot of money — because we are going to get a good healthy share of that. And the publishers know that if my clients are happy and I am happy then we are going to produce some terrific work for them that they know will be profitable. So they are very happy to make me happy.

DAK: *Are you currently the only agent representing contemporary American comic-book artists and writers?*

MIKE: Well, I'm the only one that I am aware of, although I am sure that people will get into this kind of work one way or another. It is too wide open for it not to happen. I expect that there will be more. The thing that I am offering, of course, is that anyone else isn't as connected or experienced as I am. It is no longer a New York business, for instance. Comics are published all over the country. Creators are all over the country. It would be hard for someone else to duplicate the contacts that I've got.

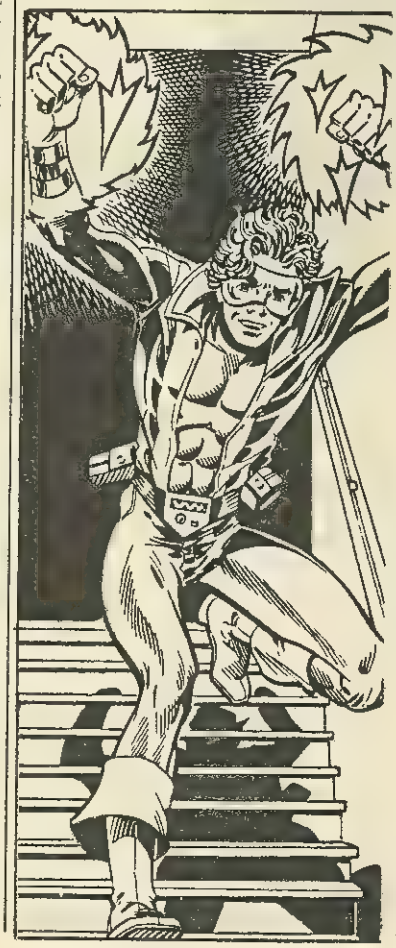
DAK: *Do you think there is a chance of some big literary agent moving into the comics field to represent someone?*

MIKE: Sure. They are welcome to it. They *are* going to have to educate themselves. There is a lot to learn that is very specific to comics.

JIM: *Different companies offer different types of deals. What do you generally try to get for your clients?*

MIKE: Next week everything could change, so I hate to pin myself down. Part of what I offer my clients is my monitoring system. I try to keep up with what the trends are in deal-making — who is making what deals with whom — in order to be able to tell what the thinking is in a particular company, in order to see where they are flexible and where they are not, where they will change their offer and are willing to bend and make trade-offs. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Every deal has got positives and negatives to it. There is no perfect publisher for anybody. You have to decide that, okay, I am going to get this benefit and I have to deal with this risk. With some you might get a lot of money, but you've got to worry about whether their production quality is any good. Others have got great production and reasonable promotion, but their royalty is weak. Some people are great domestically, but terrible for foreign sales. Other people are stronger in the licensing — but don't offer you very much in that area. So a creator has to ask, is a small peice of a large pie better than a large piece of a small pie? These are very individual questions that I discuss with my clients and try to resolve with them before I even initiate publishing negotiations.

"Surge," of Evanier and Meugniot's "DNAgents," agented by Friedrich.



DAK: *How did you come to this juncture, Mike? Did you ever foresee yourself doing this?*

MIKE: No. I think that I've gotten used to the fact that there is no such thing as a permanent career in America today. It was one of those instant decisions. On a Thursday I decided that I needed to develop a new career for myself and on Saturday I became an agency and by Monday I had three clients.

I was aware about a year ago, with all the deals that were starting to break at the time and with so much money being thrown at creative people by publishers, that there were going to be agents in the field, eventually. It was inevitable, since every other field had them once these circumstances arose. And so, six months after that, I was kicking around for something to do, and I figured, "Let's give a shot — see what happens." So far, it has worked out fairly well.

DAK: *It was sort of a natural outgrowth of all the things that you had done before.*

MIKE: Right. It enables me to handle the deal-making that I enjoy a lot. I enjoy doing business. It's a lot of fun.

DAK: *When you started writing comics, did you ever think that you'd be on the business side?*

MIKE: No, but there is a continuous thread. I can trace how it happened. It had to do with control. As a writer, I realized I didn't have any control, that the editors had control, so I moved into editorial work. As an editor, I realized that the editor didn't have any control, the publisher had control, so I moved into publishing. As a publisher, I realized that the distributors had control. But then I began to realize that it was the terms of the business that were changing. I began to see again that the real key relationship was between the customer and the creator. That relationship was fairly minor in the days when I started writing comics; I mean *I* didn't deal with customers, I dealt with an editor, ant that editor had little direct contact, himself, with readers. And that was the only relationship that I had. Today, an editor has to deal directly with the marketplace because the marketing

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publisher that is working towards everyone's profit."

© 1985 Thomas Russell and Colbert

A panel from ELRIC, drawn by Craig Russell, agented by Mike Friedrich.

has changed. There has been a significant marketing shift from comics distributed on the coat tails of magazines to specialized distribution. That shift has led to far more information being fed back up the chain, so that the publishers know more about why things sell. When I started in the '60s, no one knew why things sold. It was all guesswork, and whatever they knew, they knew a year after something was published. Now they know almost *before* it is done whether something is going to sell or not, or within three months afterwards, at the outside. With that change, the relationship between the creator and the company changes, and now the creator has control. I have always felt, as a creative person, that the more control given me as a creator, the better comics I was going to do — and now I am able to make that idea work. That is what I do now.

DAK: *And you also enjoy the business part of it?*

MIKE: Oh, yeah. It is tremendously fun. Again, a lot of it is the making real of the dreams that I had for many years. I think for creative people now it's one of the best times for having lots of fun — 'cause there are so few real barriers in your way; it's all yours now!

I express very strongly to my clients that, of course, there is a responsibility associated with all of this. Now you can't blame anybody if you don't do a good comic — it is not the company's fault, it is your fault. If the book does not sell, it is because you are just not writing or drawing something that customers in this market want to read. Some of that is maybe that you have different tastes, that you appeal to a market that this particular marketing system does not reach, but you can know that difference now before you go in.

DAK: *Are you ever tempted to dive back in again as a writer or a publisher?*

MIKE: Well, as far as writing is concerned, I don't seem to have anything that I want to write about - so the answer is "no." I sort of lost that juice. I don't know where it went. I think my scripting career was sort of writing about all my teenage fantasies. I did that. I don't have them anymore — so there is nothing to write about. At least, as it relates to this marketplace. I feel that the deal-making I do is very creative; I am putting together connections of ideas and things that nobody else can do. That is creative work to me

Publishing is a whole other game. I was a hand-to-mouth publisher for a number of years and I made the economic decision that at my stage in life, I didn't want to do that again. And if I were going to publish again, it would be on a very serious sort of basis, with a lot of capital. I don't have it and I know there is a personal as well as financial cost to get it. But as I said, I don't think there is any such thing as a permanent career in America today. Twenty years from now, I may have done three other jobs by then.

DAK: *You don't think the fact that distribution has changed so much would make it easier, perhaps, to publish?*

MIKE: I don't doubt that I know what sells and what could sell. It takes a long-range plan and a lot of money. There is a tremendous cost investment involved — time and effort as well as capital — in developing a company on a serious basis. Anyone can start a company to publish what they can write and draw themselves — or material a friend writes and draws. But to really commit yourself to the career of being a publisher is a tremendous investment; right now, I am just not interested in making that investment.

DAK: *There are so many publishers around now. Do you think the field is going to continue growing as it has for the last few years, or do you think there may be a shake-out?*

MIKE: Well, the shake-out is already occurring, but in areas people aren't aware of, or paying much attention to. The back-issue market has been soft in the last couple of years. Any retailer holding a significant inventory of back issues is wasting his or her money and should dump them. The fanzine market is very highly competitive and very affected by all of this. On the other hand, I see the new-comic market continuing to boom, at

"X-MEN/TEEN TITANS will sell a million."

least in short range terms, for the next two to five years. I don't see any let-up. There are a lot of question marks associated with that growth, though. There needs to be growth in the management skills of all of the publishers as they get bigger, and there needs to be a lot more creative people coming into the business, with fresh ideas. If the new people don't come in, or the companies are mismanaged, then a lot of negative effects could occur and those companies could fall by the wayside.

DAK: *What are your thoughts about the distribution side?*

MIKE: Distribution is going whole-hog. There will be ten times as many specialty outlets serviced than there are now. The speciality market has not yet penetrated the whole continent. It is filling in all of the states and all the provinces very nicely, but still has a long ways to go. I think it will reach numbers virtually identical to what is serviced by the regular magazine distributors now. That is going to take a while.

DAK: *Dick Giordano said DC did a survey that saw a four to five-hundred percent growth potential. Do you think that is realistic?*

MIKE: I think that is conservative.

DAK: *Where are distributors going to find these outlets?*

MIKE: They are just going to keep opening up. There could be an outlet for every tenthousand people. I don't know what your idea of the market is, but we are talking about servicing the general population. People will read comics if the comics are made conveniently available to them. This is true all through the US and Canada. If the comics are there and you don't have to expend a lot of energy to buy them, you will buy them. Each comic store that opens up, or any kind of outlet that carries comics on a regular, consistent basis develops brand-new local business, because of that convenience factor. The so-called collectors will, of course, drive hundreds of miles to go to a convention. That is not the general population. The general population will go to a comic outlet, if it is where they already shop.

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DAK: *How much do you think the distributors' perceptions affect sales? For instance: distributors expect first issues to sell extremely well, so they order a lot. And since collectors have noticed second issues are in shortage because not as many people were buying them, second issues now sell well. But distributors routinely expect sales to drop with the third issue of a new title, so they order less. Is that a self fulfilling sales prophecy?*

MIKE: The market is affected, but to what degree, I couldn't say. You are talking about a very specific problem — the launching of a new title. I mean, in any given month only two percent of the product is new material. But the overall effect of the system is that the retailers are ordering what their customers are buying. In this light, the distributors don't have any effect whatsoever, except the positive one of being efficient — as far as most of the titles are concerned. On a new title launch you have peculiar problems, as you mention.

DAK: *I was just wondering how much their expectations influence the actual sales.*

MIKE: For initial issues, their expectations have a lot to do with sales. For example, dealers expect that a new DC title sells better than a new release from a smaller company. However, expectations are subject to change. Two years ago, you couldn't sell a new DC. Well, all of a sudden, after two years of new DCs actually selling very, very well to consumers, those expectations have obviously changed. Now, many of the new companies are going through the same thing. First Comics is establishing its own identity. Pacific is establishing its own identity. Eclipse is establishing its own identity. It won't be too long now until there will be an expectation that a new First or a new Pacific or a new Eclipse title will sell — whereas, a year ago, there would have been no expectation that they would sell. Any new company trying to get off the ground in any field is going to have this problem.

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Russell art from ELRIC, published by Pacific Comics.

DAK: *Do you think sales will ever increase to the point where one issue of a comic could sell — as happened in World War II — a million copies?*

MIKE: Oh, yeah. I am convinced we will have our first million-selling comic within the next two years. And we will have them on a regular basis within the next five years.

DAK: *That is a complete reversal of the trend.*

MIKE: Actually, the trend turned around three or four years ago. It became noticeable to major publishers about four years ago, and it is just now becoming more noticeable to everybody else. For instance, now there are a growing number of books that are selling more than a hundred-thousand copies each in the direct sales market. And every year, two or three more books go onto that list. We are very close now to having titles that regularly sell more than two hundred thousand, just through direct sales. When you add whatever ID sales there are in addition to that, the numbers add up. A spectacular book like an X-MEN/TEEN TITANS team-up could, in two or three years, sell a million copies.

DAK: *What are IDs, for people who don't know?*

MIKE: There are two different comics distribution systems - one being the so-called magazine distribution system, whereby a national distributor sells copies to regional magazine wholesalers, called in-

"Two years ago, you couldn't sell a new DC."

dependent distributors or IDs, who supply "convenience stores" such as 7-11s and grocery stores and drugstores with magazines. There has also grown up a specialty distribution system that focuses on distributing comics, which are sold directly to them by the publishers, who call them, in their internal lexicon, "direct sales." I call them speciality sales. It is a specialty distribution system.

DAK: *Considering you've had a lot of contact with distribution over the years as a publisher and as a direct sales manager — what about rumors that the national distributors are Mafia connected? Is that true?*

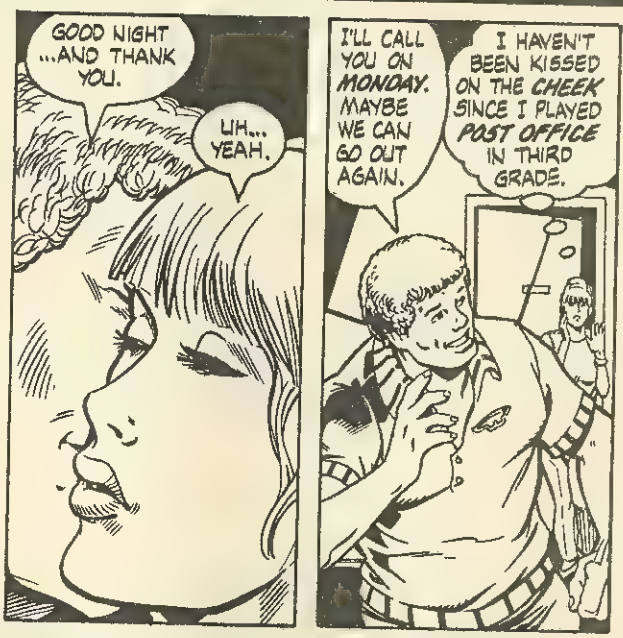
MIKE: How can I answer a question like that? You're asking me a question with legal implications, so I have to answer, in that fashion, that I have no evidence to support your statement.

JIM: *Getting back to your agenting, what about somebody who is doing established properties owned by a company — for example, someone doing THE HULK for Marvel. Would you be able to represent them, or would that be only if they prepared new material?*

MIKE: Well, I have represented a couple of clients within the context of their acting as employees, in effect, for a company, doing company-owned products. Other than convenience, there really is no reason for a creative person to have an agent handle these kinds of negotiations. I don't see any reason for a creative person to do work that they don't own. They can do work on a character that they own and receive the same compensation in the short run that they would receive working on a character that a company owns, along with significant control; and in the long run have significently higher compensation. A lot of people have, of course, a good relationship with publishers. There is nothing wrong with someone wanting to work exclusively for a publisher, but there is no reason why that context requires you to work exclusively on things that a publisher *owns*. If they are interested in you as a creative person, then you are not replaceable.

DAK: *What do you forsee for the future of company-owned characters that are now very popular — such as Superman or Spider-Man?*

MIKE: I have my own speculation, but there is really no way to tell what will happen. There are a lot of creative people who are comfortable working as an employee on someone else's creations. There is not as much responsibility, you don't have to think as much. Let the publisher take that responsibility. And some people are comfortable with that. There are a lot of other people who grew up with characters that had some meaning for them as children or as young adults, and this has entered their fantasy life. So for their own personal enjoyment and self fulfillment they want to be an ongoing part of the creation of those fantasies. Since the company owns those fantasies, they work for the company. Hey, it's their life!

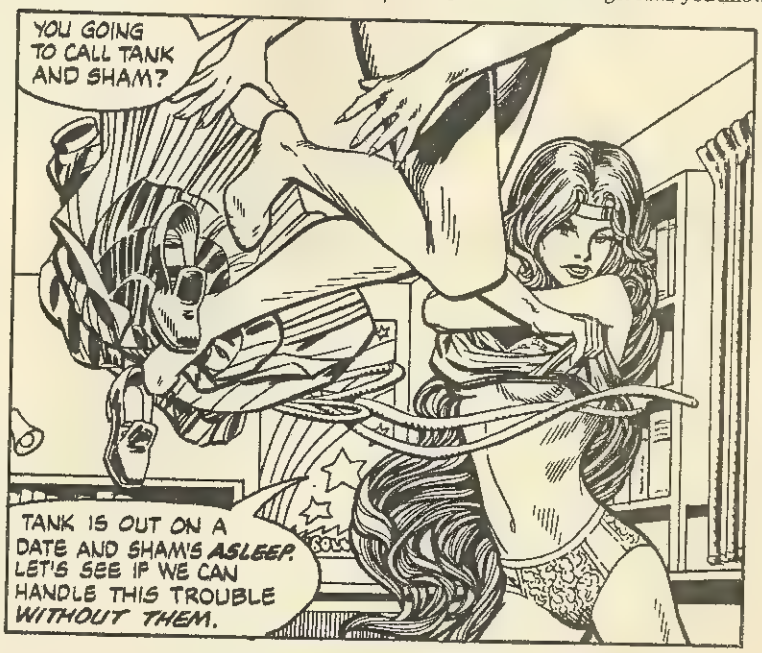

GOOD NIGHT ...AND THANK YOU.
UH... YEAH.
I'LL CALL YOU ON MONDAY. MAYBE WE CAN GO OUT AGAIN.
I HAVEN'T BEEN KISSED ON THE CHEEK SINCE I PLAYED POST OFFICE IN THIRD GRADE.

© 1983 Mark Evanier and Will Meugniot

Teenage romance (above) and calls to danger (below) — the world of the DNAgents.

DAK: *Do you see that situation changing?*

MIKE: I suspect that as time goes on, and we are talking here about an extremely long period of time, as more and more creators learn that they can create their own fantasies, and go with them wherever they feel like, they will choose to do so. If you do Batman, you do a particular character. If you do Spider-Man, you do a particular character. You can't take them past a certain range. And you know


YOU GOING TO CALL TANK AND SHAM?
TANK IS OUT ON A DATE AND SHAM'S ASLEEP. LET'S SEE IF WE CAN HANDLE THIS TROUBLE WITHOUT THEM.
BOW

© 1983 Mark Evanier and Will Meugniot

"It is possible that in thirty years no

that or should — going in to it. Whereas, if you own something and you want to do do a particular type of material with that character, you can — and then, later on, if you change your mind, you can go some other way with it. It's your character; you can do it!

Let me be clear here — you may have a trade off with your market. Your audience may not like where you are going and so you'll have less sales. But that is *your* decision to make. It may be that the reverse is true. You may have more sales. Or maybe you don't care about sales. Maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe doing what you do is what is important. Those are your decisions.

Back to your question — it's my feeling that as this new kind of working situation becomes a much more visible option to people, the bottom-of-the-line established characters are going to wither away. Possibly even the top-of-the-line could go. It is possible that in thirty years no one will want to write SUPERMAN.

DAK: *Can you see a day when the top creative people will not want to work on what are now considered top books?*

MIKE: There are a lot of people who would say that is already occurring that company-owned characters are, in effect, entry-level jobs. The company pays a creative person, gives them on-the-job training, to learn how to do comics. If the company feels that is fine, and the creator feels he benefits from that relationship, that is fine with me.

Anything is fine with me as long as creative people are doing it consciously — that is as long as people understand what relationships they have and why they have them, and decide to have them. It is my job to present to creators what the options are and what the various trade-offs are. If you own something, you have a higher risk. It may not make you as much money as if you worked on something pre-established that the company owns. Obviously, if a new artist is given a choice between drawing X-MEN and creating his own character, he is going to make more money drawing X-MEN for a significant period of time than he will drawing his own character. It may well be that the person wants to draw X-MEN for a while and get that great reward, while building up his name so he can go on and draw his own character.

JIM: *Can you tell us about the Steve Gerber project you agented?*

MIKE: It has the current title of VOID INDIGO. I guess it is best described as a sword-and sorcery series set in the present. The plot assumes that reincarnation takes place over hundreds of thousands of years and spans intergalactic space. And so, in a cosmic battle that occurred thousands of years ago, the bad guys won, and a good guy was bumped off. Thousands of years later, after many, many reincarnations, his soul is now an alien, and this alien returns to earth for various reasons and starts seeking out his long lost love and seeks to redress the balance of this age-old battle. That is the basic premise. **Val Mayerik** will pencil, ink and color the material, as long as he can stand up and do it — maybe he'll have to find someone else to help him out at some point, if the sheer amount of work proves too much.

DAK: *Is there a firm publication date for the first graphic novel?*

MIKE: No. That is basically up to Marvel However, I would assume late '83 or early '84, based on current expectations. The deal was just made, so no work is actually done, as of yet.

DAK: *Are you at liberty at all to discuss the deal that was made to settle Steve's lawsuit against Marvel for HOWARD THE DUCK?*

MIKE: It has been explained to me by Steve that the settlement that was reached with Marvel is private and that he cannot

Good example of extensive use of surprints in DNAgents #4. Top: Overlay to be "held" in one color. Bottom: Black plate.

© 1983 Mark Evanier and Will Meugniot

one will want to write SUPERMAN."

share the details with me and he hasn't. Your guess is as good as mine. He says he is happy.

DAK: *You also mentioned DNAgents. Tell us a little about that.*

MIKE: I related earlier how I became an agent on a Thursday and had three clients by Monday. Two of those were **Mark Evanier** and **Will Meugniot** on Sunday; it was **Steve Gerber** on Monday. I was travelling from San Diego back home to Berkeley and drove through Los Angeles, staying at my friend Mark's place. He had this thing that he and Will had decided to develop. I told them what I was doing, and they said, "Perfect." And they gave it to me to represent.

DAK: *Did you represent it to all the different places?*

MIKE: It went out, I think, to six different publishers. Mark and Will were interested in getting the widest possible exposure and so I sent it around to as many publishers as I thought were appropriate. Every one of them expressed some sort of positive interest. Ultimately, a number of them passed and two or three made firm offers. After intense negotiations and consultations, Mark and Will decided that Eclipse was the best publisher for them on that particular property.

I don't want to give the feeling that that is the only way I work. I have developed a couple of properties at the publisher's request. A publisher or editor will call up and say he'd like to do something in this vein and do I have anyone who is interested in doing that? I will call up someone I know and say, "There is a publisher who is interested and who is making this kind of an offer. If you want to accept that offer, here it is." Sometimes, I only send material out to two or three publishers. I try to be as individual as I can.

DAK: *Do you foresee a time when you will have the Mike Friedrich Agency, with a whole staff of people?*

MIKE: I have started to develop a free-lance "staff" already. I have a CPA that does auditing for me, I have a promotional director, and pretty soon I am going to need some administrative help. I anticipate having an agency in September. One downside effect, going through so many career changes in my life, is that I really don't look forward very far. I have no vision of what life will be like for me in five or ten years. In terms of expectations, I can barely get past this summer!

IT HAS NOT BEEN UNHEARD OF...!
THE CAPTAIN SMILES, APPRECIATING THE JOKE.
IT IS GOOD, HE FEELS, TO HAVE A PROPER EMPEROR IN MELNIBONE AGAIN.
A EMPEROR WHO KNOWS HOW TO TREAT HIS ENEMIES, AND WHO ACCEPTS UNSWERVING LOYALTY AS HIS BIRTHRIGHT.

"I guess I owe SUPERMAN a lot."

Photo: Sam Walton

ED THOMAS

Versatile is the word to describe [illegible] long-running weekly humor column for THE RED AND BLACK, the student newspaper at the University of Georgia, Thomas has also found time to write feature articles, co-script one of the paper's comic strips and even teach a speech course at the university. He'll be editing the paper's football supplement this fall. And — of course — he's an ardent comics fan, with a collection of nearly 13,000 books.

He talked about those comics over a pitcher of Coors at T.K. Harty's, a popular Athens, Georgia nightspot . . .

JIM MASSARA: *What is your favorite comic book?*

ED THOMAS: That depends on the creative team, I guess. Those things change. It would probably be easier to ask me who my favorite character is. Year in and year out, it goes back to Superman. Superman's the one that got me into it, so I guess I owe him a lot.

JIM: *What was it about the character?*

ED: SUPERMAN was the first comic book I ever read. I remember going to a day camp in Atlanta when I was real little, first and second grade, and I remember reading comics in the back of the car going there.We'd read them during rest hour at the camp. We were supposed to be lying on our bunks and we'd be reading these comics. And, oh God, how we used to treat them. The covers would get torn off, we'd fold them back over, roll the bindings and do everything that makes a book useless. I wouldn't think of doing that now. I cringe when anyone picks up one of my comics now.

JIM: *Were you conscious of why you liked certain books more than others, back then?*

ED: I was conscious that I liked certain artists, but I didn't know who they were. When I was a kid I could tell the difference between **Wayne Boring** and **Curt Swan** on SUPERMAN, and I knew I liked **Curt Swan** even then. But I couldn't tell who wrote the stories, even though I picked up certain names from the letters columns. You know, **John Broome, Gardner Fox.**

So I started out on DCs. In fact, I was in junior high school before I ever really bought any Marvels. Since then I've gone back and gotten the early ones that I missed, but I was brought up on DC and would have to say that even today they're my favorites.

JIM: *You sound like a DC loyalist. But didn't any of the Marvel innovations appeal to you?*

ED: Well, eventually. Once I read them, I got into them, and today they're some of my favorite titles. I like SPIDER-MAN, THE X-MEN. I always liked DAREDEVIL a lot, too.

FANTASTIC FOUR right now is, believe it or not, *not* one of my favorite titles, even though **John Byrne** is doing it and I like his stuff a lot. X MEN was one of those titles I would go to the newsstand for every day when **Byrne** was on it. I still like X-MEN, though.

JIM: *What do you think of killing off super-heroes?*

ED: (Long pause) Let me put it this way: There are a few *I* wouldn't mind killing off.

JIM: *Name one.*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Ed Thomas
Occupation: Graduate student in speech communications, the University of Georgia
Born: 1957, Atlanta, Georgia
Favorite Football Team: The Georgia Bulldogs

"Curt Swan is one of the best artists around."

ED: (Another long pause) Well, darn, I really can't think of one now. Maybe I was talking about certain artists and certain editors. Maybe I was talking about **Jim Shooter.** (Laughter.) I'll put it another way: I did *not* like X-MEN when **Dave Cockrum** took it over from **Byrne.** I just cringed when I read it every month. But I like **Paul Smith's** work.

JIM: *And Bob McLeod. He's one of your favorites, isn't he?*

ED: Absolutely. I'm from Atlanta and I've met him at several conventions. I never fail to get a sketch from him. I've got pages and a cover he did for THE NEW MUTANTS. He's from Florida, so he's from the South and he's very friendly. It seems like he cares about doing a good sketch, and I can't say that about artist I've gotten sketches from at conventions. Not Bob, though. He always tried to be as good as he could be.

And **Curt Swan.** I think he's one of the best artists around, and I'll tell you why: He's done the same character for 20 years. I was looking at my collection the other day. I've got my collection indexed by artists, and I was looking from SUPERMAN #200 up to the current issue. **Curt Swan** had missed, like, eight issues. Eight issues! I mean, at one stretch he did 75 consecutive issues of the same comic. You wouldn't have that today. It's like in baseball. You play two or three years for one team, establish yourself and go free-agent. That's what artists are doing today. How many times do you hear of so-and-so, the new "permanent" artist on THE MICRONAUTS, or whatever? And then 10 issues later he gets tired of the title and wants to move on. I understand how people can get creatively stifled. But here's a guy who has done a character day in and day out.

What I'm trying to say is in the '60s you had that kind of stuff. You could pick up an issue of THE FLASH and you *knew* **Carmine Infantino** was gonna draw it, and **Joe Giella** or **Sid Green** was gonna ink it. And if you really got a treat **Murphy Anderson** might ink an odd issue or two. Same thing with GREEN LANTERN. Same thing with THE ATOM. Even at Marvel you knew **Jack Kirby** and **Joe Sinnott** were going to be doing FANTASTIC FOUR.

JIM: *Is that why your collection is so heavily Silver Age?*

ED: Right. It brings back memories of when I was a kid. I can remember all the comics I used to have when I was a kid. My mother would periodically — no pun intended — throw them out. Like the cultural revolutions of Communist China, my closet would be purged of comics. In some cases it's cost me a lot of money to get those books back.

You talk about Marvel, but look at all the stuff DC had in that same period. You had **Carmine Infantino** on THE FLASH, you had **Murphy Anderson,** you had **Gil Kane** on GREEN LANTERN, you had **Curt Swan.** I don't really want to talk about BATMAN, because I think that was a bad phase for him with the TV show coming out. But there was THE LEGION, with **Curt Swan** and **Shooter** when he was coming up. Those are comic books I grew up with and those are some of my favorites.

When I was a little kid we had a convenience store right down the road. I would walk down the road to the store, pick up Coke bottles along the way. By the time I got to the store I would have picked up six or seven Coke bottles, which gave me enough money to buy one or two comics. Then I would pick up bottles on the way home. And depending on what was coming in I would go back the next day with all those bottles and invest in more comics. That was how I bought my comics.

I did this all through junior high, and then I quit. But then one day, my senior year in high school, my friends and I were in another convenience store, not unlike the one I used to walk to to trade my Coke bottles for comics. We were there mainly to buy beer and toilet paper to roll somebody's yard. We were just milling around, wasting time. It was like that kid trying to buy prophylactics in THE SUMMER OF '42. You know, "I want this, this, this this, and oh yeah, could you put a box of Trojans in there for me?" (Laughter.)

So I was just standing there when I saw a comic-book rack. I know which comic I saw. I know *exactly* which comic I saw. It was SUPERBOY, starring the Legion of Super Heroes, #210. I looked at it and said, "I remember that. I remember that stuff." And **Jim Shooter** wrote the story in that particular issue. He had just come back to comics and that was weird. I was into comics when he first started and then I got out. And then I got back in right when he got in. It was like seeing an old friend you hadn't seen for years. I picked that book up (*snaps his fingers*) and instant hook.

I've been collecting comics ever since.

From the cover of SUPERBOY #210.

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

THE BIG TIME

Dear David,

Congratulations on your making it to the "Big Time." I really enjoy your writing in WORLD'S FINEST and hope to see you in other DC titles.

As for your magazine, it's great! The format — interviews with people involved in all parts of the industry — is what makes this magazine different. Sure, we care most about the writers and artists, but it's nice to hear from others involved in the final product we read.

If you are up to requests, then please, PLEASE! let's hear from **Gil Kane.** This man has done so much for DC in the last year that he deserves to be heard from.

Finally, I guess it's my turn to "Guess the Logo":

I - ARCHIE
N - FANTASTIC FOUR
T - THOR
E - CAPTAIN AMERICA
R - SUPERBOY
V - AVENGERS
I - IRON MAN
E - ADVENTURE (I think)
W - CREEPSHOW

Continued Success!

David Stone
730 Ontario St. #508
Toronto M4X 1N3

TOO MUCH INFO!

Dear David,

Even though COMICS INTERVIEW #3 was as enjoyable, by and large, as its two predecessors, I have a beef to take up with you. It has to do with the **Marv Wolfman** interview. Quite simply, the piece gave away too much *specific* information on the future course of the TEEN TITANS, particularly with regards to Terra, Robin, and Kid Flash. For instance, I'm grateful that I read TITANS #34 just the night before I read your third issue, since otherwise the revelation that Terra works for the Terminator would have ruined part of the forceful impact of the story. I'm surprised that **Wolfman** would give out such information and also surprised, though a little less so, that you would print it. Maybe I'm the odd one out, but I prefer to have story elements develop and mature in their natural course, rather than being told the end solution up to 16 issues in advance. A much better preview was given in the **Chaykin** interview. He really got my interest up by outlining the basic situation and themes, but he didn't disclose any specific future developments.

Once again, the most interesting interviews were with the people we don't usually hear from, such as **Gene Pelc** (though this piece was too short) and **Dick Goldwater.** I do agree with a certain reader from the lettercol, though, that your interviews tend to ramble and generally could benefit from a tighter focus. Your "First Look" piece was, once more, one of the highlights — perhaps because it is a piece which *does* have a definite focus.

I find it interesting that your mag is "comic-book size." This is part of a definite trend. All the new publishers are concentrating on this size and some existing magazines are even converting to the size, eg. AMAZING HEROES, NEXUS, ECLIPSE. This is an interesting contrast to just a few years ago, when the prevalent feeling was that the future lay with the magazine-sized publications — that format was commonly associated with things adult and that its larger page size allowed for more impressive results. But in the end, it seems that the familiarity of the smaller size has won out — in no small part due to the fact that comics displays are geared to that size.

"T.M. Maple"
Toronto, Canada

Most of the mail has been extremely enthusiastic about our up-to-the-minute interviews and somewhat critical of the often quite out-of-date interviews appearing elsewhere. We were especially proud of our timing with Marv's talk — on sale, as it was, at the exact same time as TITANS #34, about which Marv spoke in some detail. Your letter is the first and only one to actually take us to task for being too timely, T.M. — a criticism which I take as a compliment!

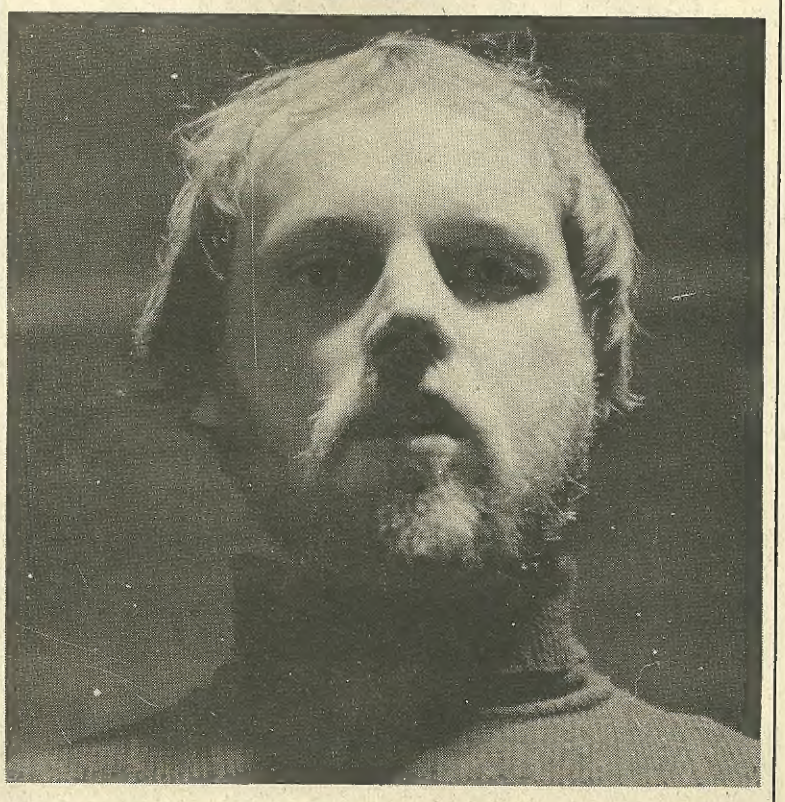
—DAK

ENEMIES?

Dear David:

The **Starlin** piece was nice, though I'm not a big fan of his recent stuff. The insight into THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN MARVEL was appreciated. I just hope the good captain *remains* dead. But then, the comics use dead people sometimes as often as live ones, don't they?

Jim Starlin



I've never been too familiar with **Roy Krenkel's** work, but his last interview was enjoyable from beginning to end and the accompanying artwork was superb. **Andy Yanchus'** interview was intolerably dry and it's too bad, given the limitations of the format, that illustrations of the coloring process couldn't be given, though I understand why.

Dick Giordano is certainly an outspoken maverick sort, isn't he? Still, he's doing what's needed to be done for a long time at DC, and I welcome his changes. I am still concerned with the outbreak of violence in DC's books, and though **Giordano** acknowledges the problem, he seems more concerned with telling what is wrong with rating books than actually devising a thorough system. I am personally offended by the very graphic violence that permeates OMEGA MEN and I dread THRILLER's premiere from what I've heard.

As for the rest of the issue, **Tony Isabella's** piece was fun, and though I've never particularly cared for his comics writing, he seems to be a very nice guy, someone I wouldn't mind meeting. "Fan In The Street" will be useless until youse guys stop interviewing only your friends.

In fact that's one thing I worry about with this otherwise quality book. As many friends as you've made in the business, Dave, I can't help but feel that you've made some enemies as well, and because of that we'll never see them interviewed, let alone mentioned.

I would love to see interviews along the lines of the **Evanier** piece a while back — full of comics history and fascinating trivia. And seek out some of the old pros. You could become a true leader in the field here.

John K. Austin
S 604 Jefferson #6
Spokane, WA 99204

We're trying, John! As for enemies, if I've made any (I sure hope not!) you can be certain it won't interfere with their being interviewed here. My goal with COMICS INTERVIEW is to eventually get around to interviewing everybody who's involved with comics — past and present, friend or foe, young or old. So stay tuned . . . and send your suggestions for the interview subjects you'd like to see the soonest!

— DAK

Roy G. Krenkel Photo: Rick Bryant

LOVES INTERVIEWS

Dear David:

Your new magazine is *GREAT!* I love interviews and this is the magazine I've been waiting for. In future issues I'd like to see interviews with **Will Eisner, George Perez, Jim Shooter, Curt Swan** and **Butch Guice.**

As for the letters in your logo the "R" is from SUPERBOY, **Mark Shainblum** has the rest right — except for the "E," which is still mysterious.

Good luck in the future.

Joseph D. N. DeMaio
Rt. 8 Box 131
Lenoir, NC 28645

JIM STARLIN

STARLIN speaks about **Warlock, Captain Marvel & Dreadstar** — GERBER, AUSTIN & OLIFF on **Deaths of Superheroes** — DC's DICK GIORDANO, part 1. From FOSTER to FRAZETTA — The last ROY G. KRENKEL interview — Cover by STARLIN.

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MUCH NEEDED BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Dear Mr. Kraft,

Having read your interview with **Tony Isabella** in issue #4 of COMICS INTERVIEW and having paid particular interest to his comments on the need for a good comics mail order service, I am writing to inquire as to how one might be able to begin such a service. Any information you can provide in the way of names, addresses, publications or source material regarding this subject would be greatly appreciated.

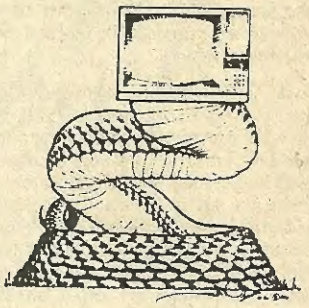
Isabella by Severin

I have invested years (twenty, to be exact) and money in the support and furtherance of comic collecting and am sincerely interested in widening my horizons and in providing a needed service to those growing numbers of fans in the comic world. By the way — and *not* in the nature of a "plug" — I find your publication to be a much needed breath of fresh air in the fanzine genre. Keep up the good work!

Scot A. Simmons
English Teacher
John Burroughs High School
9042 Darby Avenue
Northridge, CA 91325

I believe Tony has since started a special mail order service, himself—and perhaps he or someone else out there will get in touch with you after reading this. The way the comics field is growing, I'm sure someone will be happy to help you!
—DAK

SIMONSON & McGREGOR



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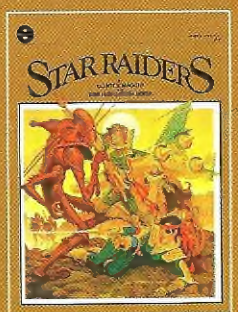

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